

DISCOURSES
ON
PERSONAL RELIGION.
IN
TWO VOLUMES.

By SAMUEL STENNETT, D.D.

VOLUME II.

Τί θέλετε; λογικῶν ψυχὰς ἔχειν, ἢ ἀλόγων; λογικῶν,
τίνων λογικῶν; ὑγιῶν ἢ φαύλων; ὑγιῶν. τί ἐν ᾧ
ζητεῖτε;

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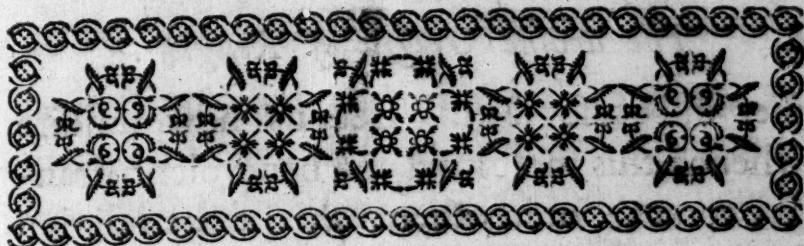
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DISCOURSE IX.

The divine Origin of Religion.



PART I.



JAMES iii. 17.

— *The wisdom that is from above.* —

W HATEVER treatment serious religion may meet with from the generality of mankind, it certainly is the noblest guest that ever visited our world. A thousand gifts it pours into every breast that receives it — gifts which directly tend to enrich and adorn the mind, and to cheer and gladden the heart. What they are we have in a for-

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mer discourse seen. Let us now inquire whence this most kind and benevolent stranger comes ; or in other words, trace religion back to its divine origin, shew its heavenly extraction, and how it is first generated in the soul of man. An argument this, which while it still farther evinces the excellence and importance of it, will teach us our infinite obligations to the grace of God for it. *This wisdom*, says our text, *is from above*.

That the apostle is here speaking of the religion of the heart, and of the genuine fruits of it in the life, will clearly appear from the context, and indeed from the general scope of the epistle. Many there were even in those early ages of the church, who amidst all their pretended zeal for the doctrine of Christ, indulged a temper and conduct directly opposite to the true spirit and genius of the gospel. In this letter therefore directed to the dispersed Jews, he sets himself with great earnestness to reprove the folly and presumption of these men ; shewing that faith without works is dead being alone, and that it cannot truly exist in the mind, if its influence be not felt in the heart, nor its effects seen in the life. And since they talked much of their superior wisdom and knowledge, to the utter neglect

neglect of vital and practical religion, he urges on them, wise as they would seem to be, their obligations to love and obedience. *Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge amongst you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom*¹. Whence he takes occasion with great justness of sentiment and force of expression, to describe the different characters of that wisdom which is from beneath, and of that which is from above. As to the former, the wisdom of which these vain and formal professors boasted, he tells them, it is *earthly sensual and devilish*, it derives from the world, the flesh and the devil, and its maxims being agreeable to corrupt nature, have a very general and powerful influence. *But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.*

By wisdom then the apostle most certainly intends in this place, the religion of the heart. So it is very frequently described in sacred scripture, especially the Old Testament. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*². *The ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths*

¹ Ver. 13.

² Ps. cxl. 10.

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are peace^a. And it is the highest expression of wisdom in the whole world, however it may be contemned by the proud, and rejected by the vain and sensual part of mankind. If to have just apprehensions of God, his nature and perfections, of ourselves and the state we are in, of Christ and the way of salvation by him, of our duty and the manner in which it should be performed, of our privileges and the hope that is set before us; if this be a kind of knowledge of the last importance to our present and future interests, then is true religion, in which all this is included, justly stiled Wisdom. And hence our Lord Jesus Christ, whose doctrine comprehends in it all these discoveries, is called the *Wisdom of God*^b. And the apostle Paul, discoursing of the excellence and sublimity of the gospel, thus describes it. *We speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world that come to nought. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory. Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*^c. I shall not stay here to

^a Prov. iii. 17.

^b 1 Cor. i. 24.

^c 1 Cor. ii. 6, 7, 8.

point out to you the wisdom that is displayed in the doctrine of the bible, which is the great object of religion, nor the wisdom that is expressed in an intire subjection of heart to its sacred dictates, which is the sum of religion. But shall immediately proceed to the main object of this discourse, and that is to shew you, *That this wisdom is from above.* And here I shall,

I. Inquire in what sense the wisdom of which the text speaks is *from above*, which will give me an opportunity to illustrate this point of its divine origin in the heart of man; and then,

II. Endeavour by some plain arguments to prove and confirm this important truth.

I. In what sense is this wisdom *from above*? And,

1. If you consider it in reference to those divine truths which are the main objects of it, it is *from above*. The discoveries of the bible are necessary to produce that temper of mind towards God, which we have lately been describing. And these discoveries are of divine original. It is by a revelation from heaven we are assured of forgiveness and

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eternal life, and instructed in the way by which we become intitled to both these great blessings. And the gospel, considering its peculiarity and glory, loudly speaks for itself, that it is not of human but divine contrivance. What man could have ever thought of the Son of God's becoming incarnate, and of sinners being justified and saved by his obedience and death? The scheme must have been framed originally in the eternal mind. It is from above, from whence the Saviour himself came, and whither he is now returned. *Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and received up into glory*^d. The great variety also of external evidence, both prophetic and miraculous, by which the bible is supported, sufficiently proves its divinity. So with the apostle Peter we may say, *We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*^e. Religion therefore, objectively considered, is from above.

2. It is in regard of its tendency and effects spiritual and divine; and in this sense

^d 1 Tim. iii. 16.

^e 2 Pet. i. 16.

also

also *from above*. It claims the superior faculties of the soul for the proper seat of its residence, and sways its scepter over the heart and conscience. It transforms the minds of men into the image of God, and makes them *partakers of the divine nature*^f. Its effects are not earthly sensual and diabolical, but pure spiritual and celestial. It refines the understanding, enlarges the soul, elevates the heart to God, and prepares it for the business and pleasures of a better world. It dignifies a man far above any other attainment, and puts him in possession of a happiness far more substantial than any other enjoyment can afford. It brings heaven in a degree down into the soul, and in a sense exalts the soul to heaven. In short, it is the first fruits of everlasting life, the beginning of future glory, and the early dawn of that one long and bright day, which shall gladden the fields of paradise to all eternity. But what I have chiefly in view is,

3. That it hath its origin *from above*. This it is true is affirmed of all the common blessings of life. But religion being a gift in its own nature the most excellent and valuable, and by reason of the depravity of mankind, the farthest from their inclina-

^f 2 Pet. i. 4.

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tion and pursuit; it may with peculiar propriety be said to come down from above. It is the offspring of divine energy, the fruit of the ever blessed Spirit. To ascertain indeed with any precision the manner in which his almighty influence is exerted on the hearts of men, is perhaps an attempt beyond the reach of our feeble capacities. Nor is it to be wondered at, any more than that we cannot comprehend the manner in which the soul operates on the body. But why should the difficulty of clearly explaining it, be admitted as a more solid objection against the fact in the one instance, than in the other? It is as we shall presently see, the doctrine of the bible, which while it allows the divine operations to be very inexplicable to our finite understandings, assures us that every good man *is born of God*.*

But what I have in the first place to do, is to give a plain and familiar account of the process of this good work on the heart, wherein we shall, I persuade myself, evidently perceive the traces of divine power and goodness. In the mean time there are two or three things to be premised, which will tend to clear the grand point I have in view. And the first is this,

* 1 John v. 1.

1. That

1. That religion itself is the most reasonable thing in the whole world ; and that the efficacy of divine grace in communicating it to the heart, doth by no means contradict the original principles of human nature. Their account of it is both unjust and unscriptural, who affect to place it in direct opposition to reason ; and think they never do it so much honor, as when they set it at variance with nature. Indeed the reason of man in his present state is corrupted, and his nature depraved : and therefore the false principles which in consequence of this have taken place in the mind and heart, must be opposed and overcome. But does it thence follow that religion is an unreasonable thing, or that God deals with men otherwise than as reasonable creatures ? He who knows what the fear of God is, sees the highest reason in it. And the divine influences, however powerful and effectual we believe them to be, are nevertheless adapted to our original frame, as composed of an understanding will and affections. It is not by a blind impulse that men are determined to that which is good ; but by the full conviction of their enlightened judgment, and the hearty consent of their renewed will. So that suppose the sinner

ner as ignorant and rebellious against God as you will, yet when a change is wrought on his heart, he is dealt with in a manner perfectly consistent with his character and denomination as a man. The communication of divine light to the mind, and the persuasion of the will, are indeed the work of God. But why should it be thought strange that he should instruct and persuade, any more than that men should be allowed to instruct and persuade one another? It is farther to be observed,

2. As this wisdom is from above, so we become possessed of it in the use of means appointed to that end. Some few exceptions there may be to this general rule. But for the most part it is by reading or hearing the word, or by the seasonable intervention of some providence, that the conscience is awakened, and the mind engaged to the contemplation of future and eternal things. As in nature so in grace, God usually works by means. Hence he has instituted the preaching of the gospel, and has commanded his servants to *compel men to come in^h, to call them every where to repentⁱ, to persuade them, and in Christ's stead to beseech them to be reconciled unto God by him^k*. And

^h Luke xiv. 23.ⁱ Acts xvii. 30.^k 2 Cor. v. 11, 20.

it is easy to see how he who holds the reins of providence in his hand, can so over-rule the particular incidents of a man's life, as to render them subservient to his best interests. The instructions of pious parents, the disappointments of life, the terrors of a sick bed, a sermon, yea a seasonable word dropt in private conversation, may doubtless with the blessing of God, prove the instruments of conveying infinite good to the immortal mind. Nay so plain are the directions which scripture gives even to unregenerate men with respect to reading meditation prayer and an attendance on public worship, that in an ordinary way there is little room to expect they will become possessed of the great blessings of religion, while they live in the total neglect of them. To which I would add,

3. That religion is a gradual attainment, or in other words, that the knowledge experience and practice of it will admit of continual improvement. It must be acknowledged indeed, that no one can be a good and bad man at one and the same time. Yet this does not hinder, but there may be many serious thoughts, many deep convictions, and many hard struggles of the mind, previous to a sinner's conversion to God;
and

and that being converted, his knowledge may be very imperfect, his faith very weak, and his hopes and joys subject to much fluctuation and change. And such a view of the beginning and progress of religion in the heart, is sufficiently countenanced by the word of God ; where it is compared to a birth, to the sowing of seed in the ground, and to the instruction and discipline of a school. So we read of *being born again*¹, of *Christ being formed in us*^m, of *the bruised reed and the smoking flax*ⁿ, of *being weak in the faith*^o, and of *desiring like new born babes the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby*^p. All which expressions may serve to check the presumption of those, who will hardly allow that there is any real religion in that heart, which possesses not an assurance of faith, and those extatic visionary kinds of joys, which they pretend themselves to have felt. No. Of Abijah it is said, *there was some good thing found in him towards the God of Israel*^q. And the apostle speaking of this very matter with respect to the Philippians, describes it as *a good work which God had begun in them*, and which remained yet to be performed or finished^r.

¹ John iii. 3.^m Gal. iv. 19.ⁿ Matth. xii. 20.^o Rom. xiv. 1.^p 1 Pet. ii. 2.^q 1 Kings xiv. 13.^r Philip. i. 6.

These

These things premised, I proceed now to describe the rise and progress of religion in the heart of a sinner. And that the divine influence may the more remarkably appear therein, we will suppose him to have spent the earlier part of life in a course of gaiety and vice, to the utter neglect of all concern about his soul and a future state. Whatever advantages of education or instruction he might enjoy above others, they were slighted and abused; and whatever checks or remonstrances of conscience he might sometimes feel, they were opposed and stifled. But now, by some affliction, by some sermon, by some seasonable admonition, or by some other means directed by providence and accompanied with a divine influence, he is roused from his deep sleep of sin, and alarmed with a tremendous apprehension of approaching danger. Death judgment and eternity are perhaps the objects that first strike him. To these his attention is fixed with earnest solicitude, whilst his past sins, beheld with a confused kind of dread, threaten the speedy execution of divine wrath.

And what shall he in these circumstances do? — The uneasiness he feels puts him, it may be, upon seeking relief from worldly amusements

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amusements and pleasures. To them he flies — But all in vain. These false remedies rather exasperate than palliate the disease. His fears quickly return, heightened and aggravated by a clearer view and more pungent sense of the guilt he has contracted. — Still eager to obtain quiet to his restless mind, and forced from this vain retreat of sensual gratification, he perhaps resolves on reformation, and thinks to add to it the merit of some extraordinary acts of austerity and devotion. What he thus resolves he attempts — but alas ! he fails in the attempt. He is unequal to the painful labors which slavish fear would impose ; and sad disappointment convinces him how deceitful all his vows were, and, how fruitless all his best endeavours to expiate past guilt.

Sin now appears more exceeding sinful, and his heart far more depraved and treacherous than he ever yet apprehended it. And thus wretched and helpless he cries out — “ What
“ must I do ? Whether shall I flee ? — Am I
“ undone — utterly undone ? — Is there no
“ balm in Gilead — no Physician there ? —
“ Yes, says Mercy, there is ;” whilst with one hand she gently holds him up from despair, and with the other points to the bleeding sacrifice of Jesus the Son of God.
— “ Well,

— “ Well, replies he, encouraged by this
“ beam of hope darted on his heart, Who
“ knows but he may turn away from his
“ fierce anger, that I perish not? — I will
“ arise, and go to my Father, and will say
“ to him — Father, I have sinned, and am
“ no more worthy to be called thy son.
“ My guilt is great and complicated, and
“ shouldst thou frown me from thy pre-
“ sence, the sentence would be just. — But
“ still suffer — O suffer a helpless sinner
“ to pour out his dying groans at thy feet.
“ — Thou art my Judge, O put strength
“ into me. — Permit me to plead mercy
“ while I lie at the foot of mercy — at
“ the foot of a throne that mercy has built,
“ and thy Son has sprinkled with his own
“ blood. Will not he become an intercessor
“ for sinners who died for them? — Nay,
“ will not thy perfections themselves for
“ his sake become their advocates? Shall
“ omnipotence crush a worm? Shall justice
“ drag a sinner from the altar on which
“ the Lamb of God has bled and died?
“ Will not thy name, thy great name be
“ exalted by saving the most unworthy? —
“ Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief. —
“ On thy word — thy promise — thy grace
“ I lay fast hold. — Into the hands of Christ
“ I commit

“ I commit my guilty soul — To the in-
 “ finite merit of his obedience and death
 “ alone I refer myself. — And wilt thou
 “ reject me ? — O no ! — Thine arm I see
 “ extended to save me — compassion is in
 “ thine eyes and pardon in thine hands. —
 “ I rejoice — O the riches of the mercy
 “ and love of God ! — How vile has been
 “ my ingratitude to sin against such a God !
 “ — Were my head waters, and mine eyes
 “ a fountain of tears, I would weep day
 “ and night for mine iniquities ! — Hence-
 “ forth, sin, I wage an eternal war with
 “ thee. Henceforth, Lord, I yield my
 “ heart, my life, my all to thy govern-
 “ ment and service.”

Thus we see how religion rises into exis-
 tence in the heart of one hitherto dead in
 trespasses and sins. And this imperfect de-
 scription of it will, I persuade myself, be
 found to agree with the account our Sa-
 viour gives of it in some of his parables,
 compared with examples recorded both in
 the Old and New Testament. And though
 the circumstances of particular cases may
 differ ; yet from this instance we may collect
 some general idea of the reasoning of every
 truly serious and humble penitent. Nor can
 we I think fail of seeing the hand of God

in all this. As the heart is naturally inclined to the love of the world, and indispofed to the things of God, fo it is thus by fome circumftance under the immediate direction of Heaven, that the attention is firft fixed to the great concerns of religion. The mind is perhaps gradually enlightened, and the paffions variously exercifed. But the iffue, whatever ftuggles may be felt within, is an intire acquiefcence in that method of falvation which God has appointed, and a cordial approbation of the ways of wifdom, as moft fit and reasonable.

Nor is it for us to fay, how mild or how fevere the means may be, whereby God is pleafed to bring men into a faving acquaintance with himfelf — for how long or how fhort a time the mind may be overfpread with darknefs doubt and fear — and how clearly diftinguifhable, or how almoft imperceptible the tranfition may be from a perfect indifference about religion, to a confirmed approbation and love of it. But the influence of the holy Spirit herein is furely to be obferved and acknowledged. It is this that faftens the word upon the confcience, this that foftens the heart, this that bends and fubdues the will, and this that renews and fanctifies the affections.

DISCOURSE IX.

PART II.

WE proceed now to the principal object of this discourse, which is,

II. By some plain arguments to prove and confirm this important truth, That religion is from above, or that it is the fruit of the influence and operation of the blessed Spirit. That this is the case seems,

FIRST, Highly probable from a consideration that men have it not naturally.

By religion I mean in general the love of God, or a prevailing disposition of the heart to please obey and serve him. And by men's not having it naturally, I mean that human nature in its present depraved state is wholly indisposed to it, or in other words that persons as soon as they become capable of reason and action, instead of delighting in God, preferring

preferring his favor above all things, and cordially aiming to approve themselves to him, discover a dislike of his pure and righteous commands, and an obstinate prejudice and enmity against them. Whence the consequence is, that if their hearts are renewed and changed, it must be by a power superior to that of nature. Now there is no possible way of evading the force of this argument but by denying, either that this is a true account of religion, or that men are thus naturally indisposed to it, or that the conclusion hence drawn is fair and just, I mean the necessity of an extraordinary and superior influence in order to the conversion of a sinner. — But will any one,

1. In the first place, deny that religion is what we have just now described it, or venture to affirm that it consists merely in external acts of sobriety justice and worship, without any regard to the inward principles aims and affections of the heart? If he will, he is surely chargeable with offering violence as well to the plain dictates of reason, as to the express declarations of the bible. The great object of religion is the blessed God. If therefore our hearts are not subjected to his authority, and we are not influenced by an affectionate sense

of his love and goodness, our outward actions, however virtuous and good in themselves, can with no propriety be denominated religious. And yet, strange as it may seem, we do find men sadly prone thus to disguise mutulate and deprave the natural and proper idea of genuine religion. And having so done, it is not to be wondered at that they know how to compliment a much larger part of mankind with this venerable character, than have a real title to it. But reason itself, if duly attended to, would teach men, that the most splendid external appearances, yea actions the most substantially beneficial to society, are no farther expressive of a worthy character, than as they proceed from the temper of the heart. Let us then,

2. Inquire, Whether religion thus defined is connatural to us? Whether we bring it into the world with us? Or in other words, whether when reason tells us what it is, there are strong propensities in our breasts to it? Are we prone, as soon as we become capable of knowing that there is a God, and of being taught our duty to him, chearfully to cultivate such knowledge, and cordially to fall in with such instructions? Is there the same inclination and tractableness in the minds

of children to these matters, as to the gratification of the appetites and affections of animal nature? — Surely every one's reflection and experience will testify the contrary. Nay I may venture to add that men must acknowledge, if they have not strangely forgot themselves, that in the early part of life as well as afterwards, their hearts were averse to serious and spiritual religion, and that no yoke was more uneasy and galling to their necks, than the restraints of education and conscience. *They did not like to retain God in their thoughts*^s, and *their carnal minds were enmity against him*^t. These are facts too notorious to be absolutely denied. Yet I am sensible wit and ingenuity, unhappily prostituted to the service of depraved nature, have too often found means so to palliate and disguise these matters, as to take off from the minds of men the force of the argument hence drawn in favor of the necessity of divine influences.

But after all that hath been said of the flexibility of young minds, and of their being easily susceptible of religious impressions; of the fear of sin, yea the evident marks of piety which some in their early days have discovered; and of the pains which

^s Rom. i. 28.

^t Rom. viii. 7.

many others have been obliged to take with themselves to get rid of conscience, that they may the more quietly enjoy the pleasures of a sinful course of life: yet these things do by no means disprove the grand point. They prove indeed that there are degrees of depravity, that the light of reason and conscience is not wholly extinguished in our nature, and that education is of excellent use to direct and improve it. But no inference can thence be drawn, that the mind of man is naturally free from any evil bias, much less that its propensities are to virtue and religion. For if it were so, whence is it that there is in fact so little religion, yea so little morality in the world, as the history of every age and country sufficiently declares? And allowing evil example (of the very existence of which upon this scheme no satisfactory account is given) I say allowing it to have all the energy in it that can be imagined; is it reasonable to suppose men would be so universally subdued thereby, if their minds whilst young were in a neutral state, and especially if the balance of their inclinations preponderated on the side of religion? It were rather in this case to be wondered at that any one should yield to temptation; but absolutely unaccountable that

that so few should have resolution enough to withstand it. It is plain therefore that men are not prone to religion, or in other words that they have it not naturally.

Is it not then highly probable, to say the least, that they who do possess it, must receive it from above, that is, by virtue of a divine energy or an influence superior to the utmost force of nature? But that this conclusion may be more than probable, let us consider,

SECONDLY, That all human means for bringing men experimentally acquainted with real religion are of themselves ineffectual.

A proposition this which I shall not attempt to prove abstractedly from a comparison of the means of religion with the degenerate state of the mind to which they are applied, but from the consequent fact. If it shall appear then, that far the greater part of those who enjoy them, are wholly uninfluenced by them, we have surely a farther strong presumptive proof, that some power need be added to these means to make them efficacious. Now the fact is not to be disputed. The providence of God and the preaching of the word, yea men's own

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reason and conscience, do all in many instances concur, and operate powerfully to urge them to the love and practice of religion ; and yet they continue disobedient to it. This is the case of thousands, whilst one here and there of less discernment it may be, and who enjoys fewer external advantages, becomes a willing convert to it.—Let us but cast our eyes around, and see how the matter stands, and sure I am this argument cannot but have its weight. Behold then,

1. The heathen sage instructing his disciples into the obligations of religion and virtue. That they ought to revere love and serve their Creator, he with good reason argues from their having received their existence and all their powers and enjoyments at his hands, from the fitness beauty and excellence of virtue, from the exalted pleasure which the cultivation of it inspires, from the many temporal advantages which attend the practice of it, and from the displeasure of the Deity against vice and irreligion. And if any object the inconveniencies and reproaches, which a severe attachment to religion may possibly draw on them from the envy and malice of wicked men ; he reminds them of the satisfaction of conscious innocence,

cency, of the high rank to which religion will exalt them above the groveling multitude, of the applause of the wise and good, and the distinguished figure they will make in the annals of fame. Thus with strength of reason, and with some elevation of passion, he exhorts men to be pious and good.

But what is the effect of all this florid declamation? Why the greater part of his audience remain as totally unmoved as when he began. And as to those few who do become converts, (if he really has any) To what are they converted? To the love of real religion? Ah no! But rather, as the consequence too sadly proves, to the love of these present temporary rewards of it. They are persuaded, many of them it is to be feared, to renounce the abject tyranny of animal appetites, that they may enjoy the more refined bliss, which results from the gratification of vanity ambition and pride. And so all the boasted fruit of these reasonings is, the exchange of one kind of servitude for another, perhaps less base, but in its effects more hurtful and dangerous. — Such are the triumphs of philosophy!

“ But, say you, his want of success is to be
“ imputed to the poverty of his arguments,
“ and to the want of that authority which
“ a divine

“ a divine revelation and the certain assurance of a future state would add to his reasonings.” Let us then,

2. Change the scene from the schools of philosophy to the assemblies where Christ is preached, and see what are the arguments here used to win men to the love and practice of religion. What are they then ? The most exalted and animating that can be imagined. — Arguments supplied by infinite wisdom, founded on unquestionable authority, and addressed to all the feelings of the human heart. With artless simplicity and unaffected earnestness, we hear the minister of Jesus telling men the miseries to which sin hath exposed them in this world and in that which is to come ; laying open to their view the mercies of God ; assuring them of pardon and eternal life through faith in the mediation of his Son ; and in Christ’s stead beseeching them to be reconciled to God by him. We see him reasoning with them on the worth of the soul, the vanity of the world, the deformity of sin, the beauties of holiness, the joys of faith, the solemnity of death, the terrors of a future judgment, the bliss of heaven and the torments of hell — explaining these high and weighty points — proving their truth —
appealing

appealing to the consciences of men for their importance — and with all his persuasions mingling the most compassionate tears and prayers. — Now he warns, then intreats. — Now he alarms, then soothes — Now addresses their fears, then their hopes. — Now brings them to the mount that burned with fire, to blackness darkness and tempest, the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words; then gently leads them to mount Sion, whence are heard the softer and more endearing expressions of mercy and love. In short, duty and interest, with all the energy that truth importance and pity can inspire, unite to enforce his reasonings.

Yet, is the effect such as might be reasonably expected, or as he fondly promises himself? Ah! no. One here and there only is moved by his reasonings, and sometimes none at all. So that with a sad and heavy heart he returns to his Master, thus bitterly lamenting his unsuccessfulness; *Lord, who hath believed my report? and to whom is thine arm revealed? I have called, but they have refused, I have stretched out my hand, but no man regarded: they have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof*^w.

^w Isa. liii. 1. Prov. i. 24, 25.

But

But you will object again — “ There
 “ wants the concurrence of some external
 “ circumstances in providence, to fix men’s
 “ attention to these reasonings, and to im-
 “ press them upon their hearts. The rea-
 “ soning is just and good, say you, and well
 “ able of itself to persuade the will and
 “ move the passions : but men’s outward
 “ condition being easy and happy, they are
 “ apt to grow dull and phlegmatic, and of
 “ consequence inattentive to these matters.
 “ And this inattention is the true and pro-
 “ per cause of the unsuccessfulness of a
 “ Christian ministry.” Let us see then how
 it is with the generality of mankind,

3. When roused by the voice of Provi-
 dence out of the fascinating sleep of self-in-
 dulgence, when stimulated to serious con-
 sideration by adversity in every form of it,
 and when addressed in this state by the kind
 of reasoning just described. Disappointment
 and perplexity, poverty and want, sickness
 and death stare them full in the face ; and
 with them the faithful and affectionate mi-
 nister joins issue, sounds the alarm of God’s
 wrath in their ears, presses upon them the
 necessity of repentance, and wishes them to
 believe in Christ, and turn with their whole
 hearts unto God. — What is the effect now ?

Do

Do they give proof of a change from the love of sin to the love of God and religion ; and that they find themselves easily persuaded to the pursuit of holiness and goodness ? Alas ! With most the reverse is the case. They are roused. In their surprize they acknowledge religion to be true and important. And perhaps in the warmth of their passions, resolve they will give heed to it. But the tempest of adversity having once subsided, and the bright scenes of prosperity succeeded to it, all their convictions fears and resolutions vanish away. Examples of this sort are innumerable. It is a striking description the scripture gives of such characters, when it tells us that their *goodness is as the morning cloud, and the early dew that passeth away* *. And their picture we have drawn to the life, in the instances of Herod and Felix, and of the Jews who attended the ministry of John the Baptist, and of our Saviour himself. — But we will carry the matter still farther, and suppose persons,

4. Not only startled, but convinced by the preaching of the word, thus enforced with the awakening calls of providence — convinced I say fully and clearly in their

* Hos. vi. 4.

judgments and consciences, that religion is as important as it is true. And yet still they have not a heart for it. It is not agreeable to them. It is not what they can delight in. Of this *they* must have seen a great deal who are used to converse with dying beds. What multitudes of people, in these circumstances, loudly declare their full satisfaction as to the truth of these things! But ah! They have no tendency no disposition of heart to them. They know, they acknowledge, they cannot be happy without having their nature renewed; and yet while they seem to wish a renovation, that renovation is not effected. And is not this likewise the case with thousands in the midst of health and strength, who are all their lives halting between God and Belial? They believe what you say to them upon this matter to be true; nay they will go perhaps so far as to take up your own arguments, and faintly reason with themselves upon them: and yet they will not, they cannot (so strangely are they infatuated by their lusts) yield.

If then, after all this, the tyranny of stubborn lusts is broken, and the heart becomes free to the service of God and religion, may it not, ought it not, must it not, be ascribed to the efficacious concurrence of a divine influence

fluence with the appointed means of conversion? And to this, I persuade myself,

THIRDLY, The doctrine taught in the bible agrees; so fully and clearly agrees, that we may put the issue of the whole matter upon the plain language of scripture, with little or no comment of our own.

1. How then, in the first place, do the inspired writers represent the depraved state of human nature? They tell us that men are *dead in trespasses and sins*^y; that their *understanding is darkened*; that their hearts are *alienated from the life of God*^z; that they are *foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures*^a; yea that their *carnal minds are enmity against God, not subject to his law, nor indeed can be*^b. Strong expressions these! But you will perhaps say that they are applicable to the Gentile world only, and the state it was then in. Let the apostle reply. *What then? Are we Jews better than these Gentiles? No, in no wise. Both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin. There is none righteous, no not one; there is none that understands, that seeks after God*^c. And if such be the condition of mankind (as

^y Eph. ii. 1.

^z Chap. iv. 18.

^a Tit. iii. 3.

^b Rom. viii. 7.

^c Rom. iii. 9, 10, 11.

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we have indeed already seen it is) and if scripture thus establishes the fact; is not the presumption strong in favor of the important truth for which we contend? To go on,

2. Will not this presumption increase, whilst we listen to the humble and undisguised language of the first great missionaries from heaven, when receiving and executing their instructions to a world sunk into this apostate state? Whilst we listen I say to their acknowledgments and prayers to God, and to the promises hopes and encouragements given them in return? Can we hear an apostle, sensible of the infinite difficulty of reducing men to obedience, thus exhorting, *Who is sufficient for these things*^d? an apostle, grieved on some occasions for the unsuccessfulness of his ministry, thus complaining, *Who hath believed our report*^e? and an apostle, I will add, at other times, thus triumphing amidst a circle of numerous converts, *The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds*^f? Can we hear them all, prophets and apostles, humbly acknowledging that *he who planteth is nothing, and he who watereth is nothing, but*

^d 2 Cor. ii. 16.

^e Rom. x. 16.

^f 2 Cor. x. 4.

that

that it is *God who gives the increase*^g; all joining in one prayer, Reveal, O Lord, thine arm, make thy mighty power known! and in a word their Master himself assuring them that he will shed his Spirit upon them, and be with them alway even to the end of the world^h? Can we I say hear all this, without believing, without acknowledging, without entering into the spirit of this divine doctrine? A doctrine which animated these primitive champions in their noble contention with the stubborn lusts of men, and gave them assured hope of victory, when an apostate world had triumphed over all the boasted reasonings of philosophy.

3. To this truth we find also the converts of earlier and later times, both when under their first serious impressions and in the course of their experience afterwards, yielding a full and ready assent: assenting to it not as a speculative point, a mere notion systematically taught them, and into which they were initiated by the solemnity of abstracted reasoning, but as a truth obvious to their first religious perceptions and feelings; and declaring their assent to it not by the mediums of doctrinal confessions

^g 1 Cor. iii. 17.

^h Matth. xxviii. 20.

only, but by their prayers to God, the most natural and genuine way of expressing the practical sentiments of the mind about matters of religion. How spontaneously does such language as this flow from their hearts! *Turn thou me, and I shall be turned^a. Create in me a clean heart, and renew within me a right spirit^b. Teach me to do thy will: thy spirit is good, lead me into the land of uprightness^c. Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things out of thy law^d. Direct my ways to keep thy statutes^e. Incline my heart to thy testimonies^f. Quicken me according to thy word^g.* — But the most direct and positive proof,

4. Arises from the account which scripture gives of the work itself, and of the divine energy which begets and produces it in the heart. *The Lord thy God, says Moses to the Israelites, will circumcise thine heart to love the Lord^a. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, says David when describing the numerous conversions which should distinguish the times of the Messiah^b. He shall put his fear in thee, and write his law in thine heart, say the prophets^c. The*

^a Jer. xxxi. 18.^b Pf. li. 10.^c Pf. cxliii. 10.^d Pf. cxix. 18.^e Ver. 5.^f Ver. 36.^g Ver. 25.^h Deut. xxx. 6.ⁱ Pf. cx. 3.^j Jer. xxxii. 40. Chap. xxxi. 33.

new birth our Saviour himself calls it, telling us that it is *of the spirit*^t, and assuring us that *no man can come to him*, that is, believe in him to the great purpose of his salvation, *except the Father draw him*^u. The apostles declare that it is God's *workmanship*^w; that *he who is in Christ is a new creature*^x; that *the new man is created after God in righteousness and true holiness*^y; that it is *God who quickens* and makes us alive^z; that *faith is his gift*^a; that *the exceeding greatness of his power is manifested towards them that believe, according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead*^b; that it is *he who begins a good work in us, and performs it unto the day of Christ*^c, *opens the heart to attend to the things that are spoken*^d, *works in us to will and to do after his good pleasure*^e, and of his own will begets us with the word of truth^f, which comes not in word only but in power^g; that they who believe in Christ are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God^h; and in fine that *we are saved by the washing*

^t John iii. 3, 6.

^x 2 Cor. v. 17.

^a Eph. ii. 8.

^d Acts xvi. 14.

^g 1 Theff. i. 5.

^u John vi. 44.

^y Eph. iv. 24.

^b Eph. i. 19, 20.

^e Philip. ii. 13.

^h John i. 13.

^w Eph. ii. 10.

^z Chap. ii. 4, 5.

^c Philip. i. 6.

^f James i. 18.

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*of regeneration and the renewing of the holy Ghost*¹. Such is the language of scripture.

Since then it is so — That men have not this wisdom of which our text speaks naturally — That all human means to possess them of it are of themselves ineffectual — And that the bible thus fully and strongly asserts the mighty influence of the holy Spirit in the communication of it; it cannot I think with reason be questioned that it is from above. Upon the whole; This

1. Is a farther argument of the excellency of true religion. The value of a gift is not to be estimated by its intrinsic worth only, or by its utility to him who possesses it, but by the dignity and munificence also of the hand that bestows it. This consideration indeed adds a sweetness to all the outward comforts and enjoyments of life; for they are all the unmerited gifts of Heaven. And he who hath the quickest eye to discern a providence in the temporal good he possesses, knows best how to value and how to improve it. But a divine influence is more clearly observable in the communication of spiritual blessings. These are the gifts of his right hand, those of his left. These streams flow to us in a more direct channel

¹ Tit. iii. 5.

than

than the other. And religion leads the happy man who enjoys it, by an easier and quicker ascent to God than mere nature. If the good Spirit of God then deigns to pour this blessing into the heart, the consideration of his agency should surely brighten and exalt our ideas of its excellence utility and importance.

2. Do we possess this most invaluable blessing? The inquiry is of the greatest consequence. It matters little whether we are great or rich or honourable as to this world, if we are destitute of the fear of God. But this is *the one thing needful*^k: that without which we must be miserable. *What will it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul*^l? And this is that great blessing which dignifies enriches and makes happy all those who enjoy it. It is a *good portion*, far better than any earthly possession: and *it shall never be taken away*^m. Let us therefore be serious and faithful in the examination of our hearts upon this great point. And if it shall appear that we are endued with this heavenly wisdom, let us,

3. Give him the praise from whom we received it. It is *from above*; thither therefore our chearful and grateful acknowledgments should ascend. Rivers will rise to

^k Luke x. 42.

^l Mark viii. 36.

^m Luke x. 42

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the height whence they flow : so minds that came from God will return to him — return in lively expressions of joy and gratitude for his free and distinguishing goodness. It is not your temper, Christians, *to sacrifice to your own net, or to offer incense to your own drag* *. No. While you trace the hand of God in his dealings with you, admiration and wonder fire your breasts, praise and thanksgiving employ your tongues. “ Who is it that hath made me “ to differ ? What have I that is good “ which I did not receive ? By the grace “ of God I am what I am.” Such is your language. You had not wherewith to purchase this blessing : you could not possess yourselves of it. O then never think you can praise God enough for bestowing on you a gift so inestimable, and for inclining your perverse hearts to receive it ; for opening your eyes to see your need of it, and for subduing your stubborn prejudices which would have prevented your accepting it. Praise surely is comely for the righteous ! In one word,

4. If this wisdom is from above, then let me intreat those who are struck with its excellence and importance, and are convinced

* Hab. i. 16.

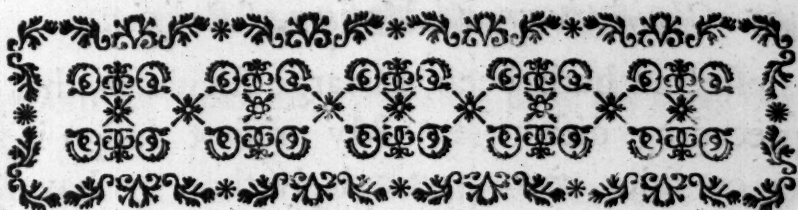
of their absolute need of it, to look for it from thence, and thence alone. A due conviction, first, of your impotence and weakness will not induce despondency, nor will it cut the sinews of labor and industry. On the contrary, it will rather awaken your most serious regards to the gracious promise of the holy Spirit, and excite your most diligent attention to the means of religion. O then! sensible of your deep poverty and misery, prostrate yourselves at the feet of the blessed God, and fear not to implore this inestimable gift at his hand, since he delights in nothing so much as gratifying the request of the poor and needy. Nay you may consider it as an happy omen of his favor, that your hearts are disposed to seek it. — Be earnest with him for the blessing. — *Ask and it shall be given you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you*ⁿ. — *Labour for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you*^o. — *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*^p.

ⁿ Matth. vii. 7.

^o John vi. 27.

^p Philip. ii. 12, 13.

the great business of religion, and how it
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X 23982 acknowledge the indispensable
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DISCOURSE X.

Christ the grand Medium of Religion.



PART I.



EPH. ii. 10.

— *Created in Christ Jesus.* —

WHOEVER gives himself leave
W to reflect soberly on the present
state of mankind, must I think
acknowledge the indispensable
necessity of the renovation of the heart, in
order to the enjoyment of God. This is
the great business of religion ; and how it
is

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is effected hath been at large shewn in the preceding discourse. My present design is to consider more particularly than we have yet done, the concern which our Lord Jesus Christ hath in this great affair. *We are created in him.*

The scope of the apostle in this chapter is to shew us that our salvation, by which he here means that part of it chiefly which respects our regeneration, is of grace. *God who is rich in mercy, says he, for the great love wherewith he hath loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ^a.* And having farther expressly declared that we are *saved by grace through faith*, he adds, *and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast: for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.* Regeneration being the effect of divine energy and grace, it is most reasonable that God should have the glory of it. And good works being the end proposed by our regeneration, it is highly incongruous to consider them as the cause or motive inducing the blessed God to save us; for if this were the case, there would be

^a Ver. 4, 5.

room for boasting, whereas now all boasting is excluded.

In the text then we have religion itself described — it is a *building* and a *creation*: and the interest which our Lord Jesus Christ hath therein — we are created *in him*.

As to the nature of internal or personal religion; that not being the object of this discourse, it may suffice to observe, that the animated description here given of it tends to confirm what hath been already said both of its excellence and importance, and of the divine influence exerted in its production. It is a *building* framed by exquisite skill, and reared by almighty power; and when the top-stone is brought forth, the happy spirits above will shout with one voice, *Grace, Grace*, unto it. It is also a *creation* — a new *creation*. God speaks the word, and behold light and order spring out of the dark and unformed chaos of the ignorant and depraved heart. So that of every one who is called by his name he says, *I have created him for my glory, I have formed him, yea I have made him*^r.

But our object at present is the interest which our Lord Jesus Christ hath in this

^r Isa. xliii. 7.

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great affair. We are created *in him*. To much the same purpose the apostle speaks, when he tells us of *Christ being in us the hope of glory*^s; and of his being *formed in us*^t; and of the *new man being renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him*^u. Now the sense is plainly this, That the religion of the heart, with all its powers and pleasures, some way or other owes its original existence and its continued support to our Lord Jesus Christ. In regard of this new kingdom, which God hath set up in the world and in the hearts of men, Christ is *all in all*^w.

I. This divine blessing is obtained for us through his mediation.

II. It is communicated to us by the influence of his Spirit.

III. It is produced nourished and improved by the faith of his gospel. And,

IV. It is in its own nature the impress of his image on our hearts and lives.

I. Religion is the fruit of the mediation of Christ.

^s Col. i. 27.

^t Gal. iv. 19.

^u Col. iii. 10.

^w Ver. 11.

Communion with God is the ground or foundation of religion. To this high privilege therefore our first parents were admitted in their innocent and perfect state; and the effect appeared in all that peace and happiness they enjoyed, and in all that chearful obedience they for a while rendered to the will of God. But by the fall this original intercourse with Heaven was suspended. For it consisted not with the honor of the holy and blessed God to converse with apostate men; nor were they in these unhappy circumstances capable of conversing with God. So was religion, that noblest guest that ever visited our world, by sin most shamefully driven out of it. Since however it was the merciful design of God to dwell again with men, and to diffuse the blessings of religion among them; it was fit some expedient should be devised, for restoring sinners upon honourable terms to the divine favor, for securing the return of the holy Spirit to their hearts, and for rendering them capable of those divine pleasures which had been totally interdicted and withheld. This expedient was the mediation of Christ. A scheme wherein the perfections of God are most illustriously displayed, to the infinite admiration and joy both of angels and men.

As

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As to the person of Christ, scripture gives us the most exalted descriptions of it, such as demand our highest homage and most profound reverence. He is *the only begotten, the well-beloved and eternal Son of God*^x. *The brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person*^y. He in whom *dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*^z. *The true God and eternal life*^a. *God over all blessed for ever*^b. This divine person consents to become a man, and so to unite humanity with deity. He is *Emmanuel, God with us*^c. *God manifest in the flesh*^d. And thus in the character of Mediator, he assumes all those offices, and undertakes all those arduous services which were necessary to bring this difference between God and man, in the consequences of which both heaven and hell were concerned, to an happy and honourable issue.

The design was grand and noble. Early notices were given of it. A series of the most august and striking miracles opened the way for the execution of it.——In the fulness of time behold ! he appears, not in the grandeur of an earthly prince, but in

^x 1 John iv. 9. Matth. iii. 17. Micah v. 2. Heb. xiii. 8.

^y Heb. i. 3.

^z Col. ii. 9.

^a 1 John v. 20.

^b Rom. ix. 5.

^c Matth. i. 23.

^d 1 Tim. ii. 16.

the humble form of a servant. He publishes the glad tidings of salvation with his own lips. Authenticates his mission with a kind of proof suited to the dignity and importance of it. Yields a chearful and perfect obedience to the divine law. Suffers a most painful and ignominious death. Descends into the cold and silent grave. Triumphantly rises thence on the third day. And in that very nature wherein he had thus bled and died, ascends through the clouds into heaven ; where he now presides over the kingdom of providence and grace, and from whence he will quickly return to judge the world.—What an astonishing scene this ! especially when viewed in connection with the grand design proposed, the redemption and salvation of his church. Sin the greatest of all evils is expiated. The demands of the law are fully satisfied. The rights of government, which ought ever to be held sacred, are inviolably maintained. An equitable constitution is established, upon the foundation of his infinite merit alone, for the justification and acceptance of the believing sinner. And in a word, effectual provision is made for the rich effusion of all the great blessings of religion as they have been illustrated and explained.

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And that these were the great objects of his mission scripture clearly teaches. He is the *Mediator between God and us^e*; the *Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world^f*; no man can come unto the Father but by him^g; he was set forth to be a propitiation for sin through faith in his blood^h; in him God is reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to themⁱ; for his sake he forgives us our sins^k; by his obedience many are made righteous^l; in him we are accepted^m; he is able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for themⁿ; and to add no more, by him grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life^o. So that you see the blessed God can now converse with men, and men may be permitted, without the least dishonor reflected upon the divine attributes or law, to converse with God.

But to bring the matter still nearer to the point we have immediately in view. Scripture represents the mediation of Christ as the actual and proper source of all the divine knowledge hope and joy, and of all the

* 1 Tim. ii. 5.

^h Rom. iii. 25.

ⁱ Rom. v. 19.

^o Rom. v. 21.

^f John i. 29.

ⁱ 2 Cor. v. 19.

^m Eph. i. 6.

^g John xiv. 6.

^k Eph. iv. 32.

ⁿ Heb. vii. 25.

real virtue purity and religion which is in the world. He is said to be intrusted with these great blessings, and to dispense them as he pleases. *He hath life in himself, and gives it to whomsoever he will*^p. *It pleased the Father that in him all fulness should dwell*^q; and of his fulness we receive, and grace for grace^r. *In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*^s. *When he ascended up on high he received gifts for men, yea even for the rebellious, that the Lord their God might dwell among them*^t. And in a word, he was exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel and forgiveness of sins^u.

Through this channel therefore we may be sure, they who flourished in the earliest ages, dark as their notions might be of the Messiah, derived all the piety they possessed. And whatever there may now be of real religion, even in those parts of the world on which the gospel hath shone with the feeblest rays, it most certainly owes its existence to the mediation of Christ. No spiritual blessing is there dispensed to persons of any age country character or condition among men,

^p John v. 21, 26. Matth. xi. 27.

^q Col. i. 19.

^r John i. 16.

^s Col. ii. 2.

^t Ps lxxiii. 19.

^u Acts v. 31.

but in this way. Christ is not the God of this or that set of professing Christians only, nor is he the author of divine benefits to us alone under the present administration ; but the head of the whole church, and the Saviour of every individual member of it. His religion therefore, in this view of it, is not topical or limited to any particular spot ; for wherever the true love and fear of God is, there is a pledge and fruit of his mediation and grace : and of all good men it may be affirmed, though their means of knowledge and experience may greatly differ, that they are created in Christ Jesus. He is the author and the finisher of their faith. Nor is there any name given under heaven, by which they either actually are or can be saved, but his. In short, all such as are *the workmanship of God* in this sublime and spiritual sense *are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone ; in whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord, and becometh an habitation of God through the Spirit*^w. He then is at the head of this new creation, of which we have indeed at present but very inadequate conceptions. He reigns sove-

^w Eph. ii. 20, 21, 22.

reign over this empire established in the hearts of thousands, in the most remote ages and distant parts of our earth.

And now what a striking and exalted idea does this give us of the dignity and importance of our Saviour's divine and mediatorial character ! And with what sentiments of gratitude and love should our breasts be inspired amidst these reflections on his condescension and grace ! Will God indeed dwell with men ? not only send down his Spirit to reside in their hearts, but his own Son to take flesh, and tabernacle among them ? How astonishing the thought — God incarnate ! — He who made the world an infant of days ! — He who rules the universe walking about the streets of Jerusalem in the habit of a poor despised man ! — He whom angels worship languishing on a cross ! We are lost in wonder.

Nor are these facts alone the ground of our astonishment. The ends proposed are truly great and noble, and the contemplation of them fires our breasts with admiration and joy. What an illustrious display have we here of all the divine perfections, while we at the same time reap the richest fruits from this unparalleled condescension and goodness ! God is glorified and we are made happy. His honor and our interest are united in the man

Christ Jesus. Exult, Christians, with joy unspeakable while you reflect on these things. Behold the great Prophet of the church shedding divine light upon your dark and ignorant minds, healing your mental diseases, and pouring life and joy into your dying souls. Behold the great High Priest of your profession offering himself a sacrifice to divine justice for your sins, and then pleading the merit of his death for your pardon and acceptance. Behold your King, swaying his scepter over universal nature, subduing all the powers of darkness by his omnipotent arm, and conquering your hearts by the charms of his love and grace. View him in these, in all the characters he sustains, and then say how resplendently the divine glories shine in the face of Christ, and what infinite obligations you owe to his mercy and goodness — To his mediation then is to be ascribed the existence of religion, and all the blessings which result from it : on which account it may be truly said that we are created in him. Again,

II. The vital powers of religion are communicated to the soul by the influence of *his* Spirit.

The agency of the blessed Spirit in regeneration hath been considered at large in the preceding discourse. All that is necessary therefore to be observed here is, that the

the descent inhabitation and influence of the holy Spirit, are the happy fruits of the mediation of Christ. Hence he is stiled *the Spirit of Christ*^x. He is said to be given *in his name*^y. And our Lord tells his disciples that on his departure *he would send him to them*^z. And the apostle declares that he is *shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour*^a. Since therefore that divine power by which our hearts are renewed and made meet for heaven, is obtained for us by the death and intercession of Christ, it may on this account with good reason be said that we are *created in him*. But the consideration on which I shall chiefly enlarge is,

III. That the faith of Christ, that is, of his doctrine and the revelation made in the bible concerning him, is the main instrument by which religion is produced, nourished and improved in the heart. *I live,* says the apostle, *yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me*^b. Now it will be necessary in order to set this matter in its proper light, to anatomize the heart of the Christian, and so, by laying open the

^x Rom. viii. 9. ^y Pet. i. 11.

^z John xiv. 26.

^a Chap. xvi. 17.

^b Tit. iii. 5, 6.

^c Gal. ii. 20.

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religious affections of the soul, to shew how they are excited moved and influenced by the faith of the gospel. To begin then,

FIRST, With humiliation for sin.

This is an eminent branch of piety. There can be no intercourse between us and an offended God without a deep sense of our apostasy, ingenuous sorrow for our transgressions, a sincere desire of reconciliation, and an unfeigned resolution of future obedience. But the instructions and motives which the light of nature furnishes to these ends are evidently defective. We may indeed from thence clearly collect in the general, that we are guilty, that it is highly fit we should be penitent, that the favor of God is most desirable, and that since he does not instantly proceed to extremities, he may possibly have thoughts of mercy concerning us. Yet the mind and conscience are so darkened and depraved by sin, that we do not fully discern the aggravations of our guilt and misery; and the ways of providence are so perplexed and various, that we cannot thence derive such notices of his mercy as are necessary to excite filial grief and penitence. Some farther discoveries therefore are requisite, in order to fix a deep impression

impression on our hearts of our true state and condition, and to light up at least such a spark of hope there, as shall at once shew us our baseness, and cause us to relent ingenuously for our sins. Now these discoveries the gospel affords, and in a perfection that is truly amazing.

In subserviency to this great design, a new edition of the law is in the first place given us; the publication of which, on account of its immediate and necessary connection with the gospel, is to be considered as having the most useful and salutary tendency. It is given that the offence may abound, as the apostle expresses it, and that by reviving the dictates of conscience which were nearly obliterated, we may see our need of all that grace the gospel reveals. While therefore the sinner beholds the divine law delivered from mount Sinai amidst the terrors of blackness darkness and tempest, and while he hears its spirituality extent and authority explained by Christ and his apostles, he trembles at the apprehension of his guilt, finding it to be far more heinous complicated and malignant than he before imagined. The voice of Moses is clearer, and sounds louder in his ears than that of conscience; and the solemn transactions of a

future judgment, as declared in the New Testament, rouse his fears in a manner the reasonings of natural religion could not do. — “Men, brethren, What must I do? — “Whether shall I flee? — How shall I “escape the wrath that is to come?” — Thus religion begins in conviction of sin, which conviction is awakened by the faith of God’s holy law, dispensed with all this solemnity to prepare the way for the seasonable and happy interposition of his grace. *I was alive, says the apostle, without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died*.*

And now need I tell you on the other hand, how the gospel itself is adapted to soften the heart, thus roused and alarmed, into ingenuous sorrow and contrition for sin? Despair, the natural offspring of conviction, while it terrifies hardens. But hope, that hope the gospel inspires, cherishes conviction and improves it into repentance. The perfection indeed of the Saviour’s obedience, and the bitterness of his sufferings, confirm the ideas just awakened in the sinner’s breast of the guilt and demerit of sin: but then the ray of hope thence darted on his mind, dispels the horrible and unavail-

* Rom. vii. 9.

ing gloom of despondency which was gathering about him, and excites a kind of abasement and contrition in his heart which are the very life and sinews of religion, the grand and leading principle of it. While by faith he beholds the Son of God meekly fulfilling the law *he* had broken, and patiently suffering death to expiate *his* violations of it, godly sorrow is quickened into life, and diffuses a warm glow of filial grief and ingenuous sadness through his breast. Surprised with the infinite mercy and grace of God in pardoning sins, many sins, heinous sins — in pardoning them at the expence of the blood of his own Son, blood shed in the most painful and ignominious manner — and in following the pardon with expressions of generosity and love which almost exceed belief; surprised I say with all this compassion and goodness, how does his heart relent! To the powerful impressions of all-conquering grace he yields. Before the God he had affronted and abused he bows. And smiting upon his breast, in the bitterness of his spirit he cries out, “ O
“ that my head were waters, and mine eyes
“ a fountain of tears, that I might weep
“ day and night for my iniquities! Ah!
“ what an ungrateful base and treacherous
“ wretch have I been, to crucify the Lord
“ of

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“ of life and glory, and to put him to open
“ shame ! Never did I behold sin in such
“ horrible colors, or my own foolish and
“ disingenuous heart in such a sad point of
“ view, as I now see them. While I cast
“ mine eye, O Jesus, to thy cross, and re-
“ member that my sins were the nails that
“ fastened thee to it, and the spear that drew
“ the vital blood from thy heart, I mourn
“ and am in bitterness as for an only son.”

Thus is the faith of the gospel the powerful means of exciting repentance for sin. And it is by a growing acquaintance with the great mystery of redemption, which so amazingly heightens our conceptions of the divine glories and draws such a shade over the pride of men, that all those amiable affections comprehended in the general idea of humility, are cherished and improved in the heart. He who enters by a lively faith into the spirit of the gospel, cannot fail of being converted and becoming as a little child, of thinking soberly of himself, yea of abhorring himself and repenting in dust and ashes. For to be created in Christ Jesus is to be thus poor in spirit, thus meek and lowly in heart. — Such is the tendency then of the doctrine of Christ in respect of that humiliation and abasement of mind, which is one eminent branch of religion.

DISCOURSE X.

PART II.

THE immediate respect which religion hath to our Lord Jesus Christ, is the subject under consideration. *We are created in him.* It owes its existence to his mediation — It is communicated by the influence of his Spirit — The faith of his gospel is the main instrument of its production and improvement — And it is the lively impress of his image and likeness. The two first have been considered, and we have entered on the third, which is indeed the main thing to be insisted on. Now in order to set the influence which the faith of the gospel has upon religion in its proper light, I have proposed to consider it in reference to the several religious affections of the heart. We have begun with humiliation for sin. And we go on now,

SECONDLY,

SECONDLY, To the joys of religion.

These, as I have had occasion to shew you in a former discourse, spring from the pardon of sin — from interest in the providence and grace of God — from communion with Heaven on special occasions — and from a chearful hope of eternal life. Now the faith of the gospel, we shall quickly see, hath a powerful and immediate influence on each of these particulars.

I. As to the pardon of sin and acceptance with God. That man is truly blessed whose sins being forgiven, enjoys a peaceful conscience and a heart gladdened with the divine favor and love. But, what is it that possesses him of these invaluable blessings? It is confidence in the sacrifice righteousness and mediation of Christ. *Him hath God set forth to be a propitiation for sin through faith in his blood^d. His righteousness is to all, and upon all them that believe^e. And in him they are accepted^f.* Upon these sure declarations of the blessed God himself the humble penitent fastens, takes courage, lifts up his drooping head, and rejoices. He had stood trembling at the tribunal of conscience, awfully dreading the just sentence that hung

^d Rom. iii. 25.

^e Ver. 22.

^f Eph. i. 6.

over his guilty head. But with what new hopes and joys is his breast inspired now he beholds Jesus the righteous advocate stepping forth to plead his cause? And hears him saying to his desponding heart, as Elihu said to Job, *Behold I am according to thy wish in God's stead: I also am formed out of the clay.*

Behold my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee².

“ Now I know, says he, that God is just
“ while he pardons my sins though so ex-
“ ceeding heinous; that he is righteous
“ while he accepts my person though self-
“ condemned; and that he is holy while
“ he receives me into his favor though most
“ vile and unworthy. At his altar I find
“ refuge, for justice is appeased by the sa-
“ crifice offered thereon. At the throne
“ of grace I bow, for it is sprinkled with
“ the blood of Jesus. Thither I can now
“ boldly come to ask for mercy. Mercy I
“ ask — mercy I find — in mercy I will re-
“ joice. O God thou art my God through
“ Christ. — How reviving is the thought!
“ — Surely thou hast put more gladness
“ into my heart than they enjoy whose corn
“ and wine and oil are increased!”

² Job. xxxiii. 6, 7.

Thus

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Thus doth faith minister joy to the Christian, in regard of these interesting points of forgiveness and acceptance with God. And O how desirable this joy ! Who would not be glad to hear a voice from Heaven proclaiming aloud, That God is pacified towards him for his great and manifold transgressions ; that he loves him with a tender and cordial affection ; that his attributes are all become friendly to him ; that there is now no condemnation to him ; and that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor any other creature shall be able to separate him from the love of God ? Who I say would not be glad to hear such a voice as this from the excellent glory ? Well, but such a voice as this the blood of Christ speaks to every penitent and broken-hearted sinner ; and with such divine evidence and authority, that it is highly criminal to question the truth of it. *Being justified by faith we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ*^h. *We glory in God through Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement*ⁱ. In like manner,

2. As to the influence of divine providence and grace. To have satisfaction that provision is made for our interests both tem-

^h Rom. v. 1.

ⁱ Ver. 11.

poral and spiritual all our way through life, must surely be a farther occasion of great cheerfulness and pleasure. Many a sad and gloomy thought in respect of these matters, hath depressed the hearts of even good men themselves, in their moments of perplexity and unbelief. But how amazingly doth the doctrine of the gospel, apprehended by faith, dispel these dark clouds, and pour light and joy into the afflicted breast! It reveals the blessed Jesus, arrayed in majesty and glory, holding the reigns of providence in his hand, and swaying his scepter over the universe. To him it directs the eye of the dejected Christian, telling him how wisely equitably and well the great Mediator adjusts the affairs of the world in general, and the concerns of those who fear him in particular; how happily he disposes every event whether prosperous or adverse so as best to promote the real good of his faithful people, numbering the hairs of their head, fixing the bounds of their habitation, defending their persons, assisting their labors, guiding their feet, and suffering them to want no good thing. At such tidings as these how great are the triumphs of faith! How is the brow of adversity smoothed, and the tears of humanity dried up! How are curses converted

verted into blessings, and the cup of affliction made palatable if not pleasant ! At such tidings as these what new joys are infused into the comforts of life, and how is their flavor heightened, and improved ! “ The Lord
 “ even Jesus reigneth, let the Christian re-
 “ joice.” —

But the divine life which is infinitely more important than the natural, needs likewise something daily to sustain and cherish it, to improve and defend it. Such provision the gospel makes. Substantial food it furnishes to satisfy the hungry soul, gold tried in the fire to enrich it, white raiment to adorn it, and everlasting arms to support and protect it. The person of Christ, his atonement righteousness and intercession, his offices grace and promises, are all subjects of the most pleasing contemplation, sources of the most divine consolation. Transcendently captivating must the beauties of his person be who though a man accounts it no robbery to be equal with God, and is the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his person. In him are hid treasures of wisdom and knowledge, of grace and love ; to him the Christian is united by an indissoluble bond ; and from his fullness he receiveth and grace for grace. Great
 therefore

therefore must be the bliss which the good man feels, while by a lively faith he dwells on these sublime truths. How does the sight of Christ animate him to his duty, and make him forget the pains and fatigues which attend it! Like the men of Bethshemesh, how does he shout amidst the toils and labors of the field, at the approach of the ark, the symbol of the divine presence and glory! At the view of him whom his soul loveth, how are his broken spirits revived in a time of adversity! how is his feeble heart sustained in the hour of death! and how noble a superiority does he obtain over all the powers of darkness! “Through Christ who strengtheneth me, with triumph he cries, I can do all things. His grace is sufficient for me. I will glory, yea I will take pleasure in infirmities, that his power may rest upon me.”

3. Communion with God on special occasions, is likewise another source of religious joy. To contemplate the divine perfections displayed in his works, and to breathe out the soul to him in prayer and praise, must be an animating and improving exercise to a renewed mind. But how is this to be even attempted with any degree of pleasure, if no regard be had to Christ? Can

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a creature, conscious to itself of guilt and rebellion, with composure approach the awful presence of provoked omnipotence? Can a heart defiled with sin enjoy itself in the immediate view of spotless holiness? — It cannot. So averse is the sinner to communion with God, that he instantly shrinks back at the very idea of that great Being. And when conscience, Heaven's vicegerent, forces him into some kind of intercourse with Deity, saying, Where art thou? with consternation he replies, like the first man, *I heard thy voice, and was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself*^k.

But how is the scene changed, when by faith he apprehends the blessed Jesus, in the character of Mediator, standing between him a guilty polluted criminal and God his infinitely just and holy Judge! The conceptions he now forms of the supreme Majesty, though still awful and tremendous, are softened with a pleasing mixture of gentleness and love. In this new and living way he can have access with confidence to the object he before dreaded; and can enjoy those meditations on the perfections and works of God, which were before painful and distressing. The angel of the covenant having

^k Gen. iii. 10.

laid his hand upon him, and said, *O man greatly beloved, fear not, peace be unto thee, be strong, yea be strong*; he instantly recovers new strength, and replies with the prophet, *Let my Lord speak, for thou hast strengthened me*¹. Emboldened by the intercession of this able and righteous advocate, he can bow before the almighty with holy freedom; and through this medium discover new glories in the blessed God, such as far surpass all those other notices of him which nature or providence furnish. Now he sees *mercy and truth meeting together, righteousness and peace kissing each other*^m. And how does he exult at the pleasing sight! It gives new energy to his addresses, puts him in possession of the blessings he seeks at the instant he is asking them, and unites prayer and praise in one breath. And then once more,

4. As to the hope of heaven; I hardly need tell you it is by all acknowledged to be a just occasion of gladness and joy. To be persuaded that when this mortal life is ended I shall enter on a state of existence the most happy, and which shall suffer no change, how reviving how transporting the thought! But whence can we collect a just idea of that

¹ Dan. x. 18, 19.

^m Ps. lxxxv. 10.

state, a satisfactory proof of the reality of it, and such considerations as may reasonably encourage our hope of possessing it, except from the doctrine of Christ? A general hint of that future world once thrown out may indeed set imagination at work; and the sallies of an active and sprightly fancy in this way may entertain and please. But imagination and fancy are very insufficient grounds for substantial hope and joy. This however is not the case here. The eye of faith, assisted by the discoveries which Christ hath made, descries the good land though afar off with a clearness which sense and imagination cannot pretend to; assures us of the reality of it upon principles which nature and reason cannot of themselves suggest; and induces a hope of personal interest in it which is as rational as it is chearful and animating. And hence Christ is emphatically said to be *in us the hope of glory*".

What are all the fond conceits of heathen poets, when mentioned at the same time with the exalted descriptions of heaven drawn by the pens of prophets and apostles? What the puerile and uncertain reasonings of philosophers, founded at best on mere probabilities, when compared with the com-

ⁿ Col. i. 27.

manding evidence resulting from the resurrection and ascension of the Son of Gon? And what the flattering expectation which comparative goodness and a general persuasion of the mercy of God inspire, when put in the scale with a hope built on the mediation of Christ and the express promise of the bible, and which at the same time approves itself genuine by its suitable influence on our tempers and lives? Such a hope is truly noble and divine, and when in lively exercise cannot fail of reviving the heart and gladdening the countenance. The joys of faith, as the apostle somewhere expresses it, have in many instances balanced the most grievous sorrows of the present life, and enabled him who was naturally the most timorous to rush fearless into the arms of death. And though alas! through various causes our hopes are many times at a low ebb, yet the gospel hath the same aspect it ever had on our future interests, and faith the same power to brighten realize and appropriate unseen and eternal things. — Thus in the joys of religion you see the faith of Christ hath an intimate and immediate concern. And the like concern it hath,

THIRDLY, In that purity of heart which is the very essence of religion.

If there be such a thing as religion, it must consist in a reverential fear and sincere love of God, in a cordial desire and diligent aim and endeavour to mortify our secret corruptions, in a sovereign contempt of this world when put in competition with another, and in fervent aspirations of heart after likeness to God, and the everlasting fruition of him in heaven. Now the faith of the gospel is the most direct and effectual, nay the only means with a divine influence, to inspire us with this divine temper. — The only means I say; for the reasonings of natural religion are too feeble to compass these great objects: as he surely must be sensible who is at all acquainted with the history of mankind, and as I have largely shewn in the preceding discourse. How slowly hath the business of even external reformation advanced, when attempted upon principles of philosophy and speculation only! Nay with the aid of human laws, how difficult have moralists found it to hold men within the bounds of common decency! Will then their reasonings, will their persuasions, forcible and eloquent as they may be, turn the tide of corrupt nature, root up inveterate passions, subdue men's inordinate love of the world, and raise their
hearts

hearts to God? Ah! no. It were an idle thing, as experience hath shewn, to expect it. But the faith of the gospel challenges all these difficulties. It may, it hath subdued kingdoms of vice and sin firmly established in the hearts of men; wrought righteousness in opposition to all the efforts of Satan; stopped the mouths of angry passions that have roared like lions; quenched the violence of fierce lusts that have raged like fire; and put to flight the armies of hell and death.

Here I might shew you how this faith operates in regard of all the powers of sin and holiness, and how the considerations the gospel suggests are levelled against every secret corruption, and adapted to excite strengthen and promote every opposite grace. But it were endless to be particular. Nor need I, since you have already seen the influence of this faith to produce godly sorrow for sin. In general, *He who hath this hope in him purifieth himself as God is pure*^o. It is an exalted and pleasing idea which Christ hath given us of the blessed God and of the duty we owe him, in his own person and doctrine. In him *the only begotten of the Father who is full of grace and truth*^p, *we behold the glory of God: and beholding it*

^o 1 John iii. 3.

^p John i. 14.

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as in a glass, how are we changed after our measure into the divine likeness by the Spirit of the Lord^a! How does the indignation he hath expressed against sin in the death of his Son, vehemently provoke our detestation of this the greatest of all evils! How does a believing reflection on the sorrows and sufferings of Christ for our disinclinity and folly, aid us in our struggles with powerful lusts! And how do the mercy and love he hath herein manifested to our immortal souls, sweetly constrain us to the love of holiness! We fear the Lord and his goodness^b, while we here see all his attributes shining in their native lustre, and at the same time harmonizing in our favor. And we feel ourselves moved by the gratitude the gospel inspires to the practice of truth and justice, of meekness and patience, of purity and self-denial; to contempt of the world, and an ardent pursuit of divine and heavenly objects, The grace of God which hath appeared unto us, teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly righteously and godly in this present evil world^c. And the love of Christ constraineth us to live not unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us^d. Surely he who

^a 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^b Hos. iii. 5.

^c Tit. ii. 11, 12.

^d 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

by faith contemplates the scheme of redemption, who realizes it, and enters into the spirit of it, cannot fail of having his heart by these means refined from the dregs of sin and sense, and elevated to God. *I, if I be lifted up, says Christ, will draw all men unto me*^u — draw them from the love of sin to the love of God.

The exalted piety and devotion of the apostles and primitive saints are truly admirable. But how did they attain to these noble heights? It was by the knowledge and faith of the gospel. This was the water of life, which, while it refreshed their drooping spirits, quenched their eager thirst after terrestrial joys and pleasures. The more largely they drank of these living streams, the more pure and spiritual were their hearts. This it was that crucified them to the world, and the world to them. This was the armour in which they clad themselves for all their conflicts with sin and sense. Strengthened with this divine faith they entered the lists with the world, and obtained a brave superiority over its flatteries and frowns. They knew no religion but what had Christ for its foundation, and what owed its existence and improvement to the influence of his

^u John xii. 32.

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Spirit. Christ with them was all in all. It was therefore through him, through his doctrine and grace, they became such mirrors — such examples of humility meekness fortitude and every other heavenly virtue. Through those *exceeding great and precious promises*, of which Christ possessed them by his gospel, they were made *partakers of the divine nature*^w; they *cleansed themselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*^x; and willingly consecrated their hearts living temples to the worship and service of the living God.

^w 2 Pet. i. 4.

^x 2 Cor. vii. 1.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE X.

PART III.

WE have seen how the faith of the gospel tends to excite and promote in the heart repentance joy and purity. Let us now consider,

FOURTHLY, The influence it hath upon that divine charity and friendship, which are on all hands acknowledged to be one eminent branch of religion.

Motives no doubt there are innumerable, without recurring to the Christian scheme, which may with advantage be urged to persuade us to the love of God and our neighbour. While reason within silently teaches us that God is the most perfect of all Beings, and while the works of creation and providence around us loudly proclaim his greatness and goodness ; evidence cannot

not be wanting to convict that man of miserable disingenuity and folly, who doth not admire adore and love his Creator and Preserver. And while those bands of nature subsist which unite men in one body, and make them mutual sharers in each other's interests, no one can claim an exemption from obligations of sympathy benevolence and friendship. Yet forcible as these reasonings — these feelings may be, and indeed are, how wretchedly defective are the generality of mankind in these two great points of duty ! It is a fact to be credited not on the authority of scripture only, for experience and observation sufficiently attest it, that the carnal mind is enmity against God, and that the greater part of the world live in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. Sad reflection this ! — Charity nevertheless there is. But this fair and pleasant fruit, if genuine, is of divine growth. It is the offspring of faith. It is a lesson no where taught with such clearness as in the school of Christ, and a temper no where imbibed so freely and largely, as at the pure fountain of his doctrine.

L. As to God, how powerful are the arguments by which we are here allured to
the

the love of him ! The virtues of a finite Being though shaded with many imperfections, command the esteem and reverence of beholders, even of those who are not immediately benefited by them. But what are all the charms of the fairest character on earth or in heaven, when compared with those of the blessed God, as exhibited to our view in the gospel of his Son ! His excellencies are here displayed in the most inviting light, and our admiring eyes are held fast to this the most amiable of all objects, by the goodness as well as the beauty that thence beams on us. *God is love ; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him* *. Nature whilst she pours her bounties upon us, points to him as our Benefactor, and bids us adore and love him. But how much louder more authoritative and commanding is the voice of faith ! How irresistibly persuasive are her arguments, whilst she proclaims in our ears the free pardon of infinite offences, and the sure promise of everlasting happiness ; telling us that these are blessings obtained for us at the expence of the tears and sufferings of the Son of God ?

* 1 John iv. 16.

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Love begets love: and the effect will bear some resemblance to the cause. But what expression of love like that of God's sending his own Son to die for rebels? Can I believe this great truth — can I enter into the true spirit of it — can I hope, or even only imagine myself interested in it, and not catch fire at the thought? *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend^a; but God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us^a.* O the height the depth and the length of the love of God in Christ Jesus! *It passeth knowledge^b.* The lively faith of this amazing expression of divine mercy and grace, must needs kindle in the heart a flame of gratitude to God. — Fall down, Christian, at the feet of this infinitely glorious Being. Admire and adore his transcendent excellencies. Dwell in your contemplations on them; till you are dissolved in love, and thereby in your measure assimilated to his likeness, who is the fountain of all beauty perfection and happiness. And then,

2. As to men; no arguments surely have such mighty force in them to persuade us to

^a Rom. v. 8.

^a Eph. iii. 19.

^b John xv. 13.
mutual

mutual love as those the gospel suggest. What amazing philanthropy is that which disposeth the blessed God to take human nature into union with deity ; and inclines his own Son to suffer the pains of death, that enemies may become sharers not of mercy only but bounty ; not of sympathy only but delight and love ! This great truth impressed on the heart, must needs strengthen the natural ties of humanity, and bind men faster to one another in love and friendship than ever. It must needs dilate the mind of man, and make it capable of embracing millions of immortal beings in the arms of pure benevolence. It must needs soften the rugged and unyielding affections of the soul, and fill the breast with sentiments of tenderness generosity and love. *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us : and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren^c.*

How can wrath hatred and revenge lift up their heads at the foot of *his* cross, whose blood expiated the guilt of those who cruelly and maliciously shed it ? How can *he* obstinately refuse to forgive another a few injuries, who hath himself been forgiven great and numerous offences ? And how can *he*

^c 1 John iii. 16.

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be insensible to the sufferings of his fellow-christians, who by faith has had fellowship with Christ in his? — Behold the Saviour, Christian, who though he was rich, for your sake became poor that you through his poverty might become rich; and then ask yourself, Whether you can shut your bowels of charity against the distressed? Stand by him whilst weeping over Jerusalem; and tell us, Whether you can refrain mingling your tears with his, for the miseries impenitent sinners are bringing upon themselves? Be a witness of the tender scenes which passed between him and his disciples, especially at the close of his life; and say, Whether those natural friendly and religious affections you owe towards those around you, are not refined softened and improved by these views? “ See how the Christians love one another” was a common observation in primitive times. And the apostle John hath with good reason made this a mark or evidence of the new birth, *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren: he who loveth not his brother abideth in death*.*

Thus have we seen how religion, in all these various expressions of it, is produced

* 1 John iii. 14.

nourished

nourished and improved by the faith of the gospel. — It now remains to be considered, as a farther illustration of the regard it hath to Christ,

IV. That religion is in its own nature an imitation of his temper and example.

The regenerate are *created in Christ*, that is fashioned after his image and likeness. To him they bear a near resemblance, as children do to their parents; and as the wax does to the seal whence it receives the impression. To which purpose the apostle tells the Romans that God had predestinated them *to be conformed to the image of his Son*^f; and in the warmth of his affection assures the Galatians, that he travailed in birth for them, till *Christ was formed in them*^g. As in the first creation man was made after the image of God, so in the second after that of the Lord Jesus. Wherefore his temper and conduct when here on earth may be considered as a delineation of religion in its highest perfection. He appeared, it is true, in our world with other and more important views than that of becoming our example; yet this is expressly declared to be one. *He hath left*

^f Rom. viii. 29.

^g Gal. iv. 19.

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us an example that we should follow his steps^h.

And in what an amiable and striking light doth his example appear, as it is drawn out to our view by the evangelists ! I cannot now enter into the particulars of it, or I might tell you of the truth sincerity and uprightness of his heart ; of the sweetness tenderness and goodness of his disposition ; of his humility meekness and patience ; of his temperance self-denial and fortitude ; of his piety towards his Father, and his compassion to men. I might shew you with what heavenly and unremitting lustre and glory these divine graces shone out in the whole of his deportment. I might for the illustration of them refer you to his public sermons, his familiar discourses, his private devotions, his unwearied labours to do good ; to the miracles he daily wrought, and the various and unparalleled sufferings he endured. I might in a word call upon his parents, his brethren, his disciples, his country-men, yea his enemies themselves to bear witness to the integrity of his life, the purity of his manners, and the transcendent brightness and perfection of his obedience.

1 Pet. ii. 21.

And

And now what is the religion of the heart and the genuine expressions of it in the life of a real Christian, but a copy, a faint copy at least, after this bright and perfect pattern? It is indeed impossible for us in the present state to resemble Christ exactly. Yet his example is the standard to which we should aim to arrive, and by which we should frequently try ourselves, in order to come at a due knowledge and sense of our defects and imperfections. And it is our singular advantage that we have such a fair pattern before our eyes: for here we are not only instructed in the perfect will of God, but we have it drawn out to our view in living characters, and are urged to obedience by motives of the most generous and animating nature. It is the example of him who lived and died for us; so that while we are bound by every possible consideration to attempt at least the imitation of it, we are at the same time secured by the grace of the gospel from that slavish fear and dread, with which the not succeeding to that perfection we wish would otherwise inspire us.

And may I not affirm that there have been, that there still are, some happy persons who are thus created in Christ Jesus? Look around the circle of your acquaintance, Sirs,

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and see whether you cannot fix your eyes upon one here and there, in whom is the same mind as was in him? who is meek and lowly in heart, cautious and circumspect in his behaviour, contented and cheerful in the station Providence hath placed him, patient amidst the trials and sufferings of life, lively and fervent in the discharge of religious duties, glad of every opportunity to do good, sensible of his own defects and imperfections, apt to believe others better than himself, and cordially disposed to give God the glory of his salvation? Amiable character this! And now whose image doth this man bear? *You* will say it is the image of Christ: and *he* will gratefully acknowledge that it is the grace of Christ which hath formed him into this temper. *By the grace of God I am what I am*¹.

Thus have I shewn you that the religion of the heart, with all the powers and pleasures of it, owes its existence and support to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a blessing obtained for us through his mediation — communicated to us by the influence of his Spirit — produced, nourished and improved by the faith of his gospel — and in its own nature the impress of his image on our hearts

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 10.

and

and lives. And thus are we *created in Christ Jesus*.

With two or three reflections I shall close this subject.

1. From what hath been said we see the insufficiency of natural religion ; an observation which hath frequently occurred in the course of this sermon. Alas ! what a vain empty thing must that piety — that devotion be, which hath no regard to the Lord Jesus Christ ; or which if it doth pay some general regard to him, yet considers him not as the grand medium of religion ! If it be true that he rose from the dead, it is also true that there is no coming to God but by him. He hath himself said so. And methinks a sober and impartial reflection on the fallen state of mankind would of itself go a good way towards convincing men in the general, that something farther must be necessary to recover them from their apostasy, and to restore them to the likeness of God, besides what the light of nature is capable of discovering. The evidence however attending the mission of Christ is so grand and striking, and the explanation which the apostles give us of his doctrine is so sublime and exalted, that he who believes the one and hath any just idea of the other,

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cannot possibly treat revelation with indifference — with indifference I say, as if it contained matters which we might have remained totally ignorant of, with little or no inconvenience whatsoever. The religion of the bible is an animating thing. But that of mere nature is attended with doubts not to be solved by reason, and with difficulties not to be surmounted by humanity. If ever therefore we are created anew, it must be in Christ Jesus. If ever we are admitted to communion with God, it must be through his mediation. And if ever we possess the real spirit of vital religion, it must be by the faith of his doctrine and grace. To Christ therefore,

2. Let our eyes and hearts be constantly directed, in all the great concerns we have to transact with Heaven. Venture not, sinner, to approach God in any other way than by the sacrifice righteousness and intercession of his Son. Such an attempt will be deemed the height of ingratitude and presumption, it will aggravate your guilt, and will be sure to draw upon you the divine resentment. If you *will* think of appeasing justice by your repentance, or of meriting the favor of God by your future obedience, you must take the consequence

of this bold rejection of Christ and his grace. *Behold all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand, saith the Lord, ye shall lie down in sorrow^k. There is no name given under heaven by which you can be saved, but the name of Christ^l. How then will you escape, if you neglect this great salvation^m?*

And there being such a medium of access to God, how great is the encouragement which from hence arises to him who is sensible of his guilt and misery, who wishes above all things to be reconciled to his offended Creator, and hungers and thirsts after the substantial blessings of religion! *Come unto me*, says the Saviour himself, *all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you restⁿ*. Why should you then yield to despondency? Why should you perplex yourselves with doubts and fears? God is infinitely merciful, and he is just whilst he is the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus. Christ is able to save them to the uttermost who come to God by him; and he hath declared he will in no wise cast them out. Fly to him by faith. Intrust your

^k Isa. l. 11.

^l Acts iv. 12.

^m Heb. ii. 3.

ⁿ Matth. xi. 28.

concerns in his hands. And be assured all will be well.

Nor let those who have known Christ and believed in him, ever lose sight of him in the exercises of their hearts about divine things. Fix your eye, Christian, upon him in all his characters and offices, as your Prophet to instruct you, as your Priest to make reconciliation for you, and as your King to rule in your heart and to subdue your enemies. Look steadily to him : and so make your humble approach to God in the duties of religion ; so arm yourself for your conflicts with sin Satan and the world ; and so be prepared to endure the troubles of life, to submit to the stroke of death, and to appear before the tribunal of the great God.

3. What gratitude and chearfulness should possess our hearts, while we thus reflect on that happy and glorious medium of intercourse, which the blessed God hath appointed between him and us ! The wisdom of this constitution is not fully to be comprehended by us, and the goodness of it surpasses all imagination. Yet enough surely we know both of the wisdom and goodness of it, to inspire our breasts with joy and gladness, with admiration and praise. May the contemplation of this amazing scheme

of salvation be our frequent and noblest entertainment in our way through this world ! And at length may we arrive at that happy state where we shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known ! Then will the prayer, which the suffering Jesus addressed to his Father in the days of his flesh, be fully answered, to the infinite satisfaction of all his faithful disciples, *Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory*°. But I must not close without reminding you,

4. And lastly, Of the strong obligations which all this grace lays upon you, Christians, to universal obedience. *Ye are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that you should walk in them.* It is fit that he who hath reared this spiritual building, and who hath brought this new creation into existence, should have the honor, as well as you the comfort and convenience, of it. And how can you better magnify the riches of his grace, than by demeaning yourselves in all things as becometh Christians ! *Let your light then so shine before men, that others seeing your good works may glorify your Father who is in heaven* P.

° John xvii. 24.

P Matth. v. 16.



DISCOURSE XI.

The Means of Improvement in
Religion.



PART I.



2 P E T. iii. 18.

But grow in grace. —

WITH this short but comprehensive exhortation the apostle Peter closes his second and last epistle. An epistle directed to Christians in general, whom he describes as having obtained like precious faith with himself, through

through the righteousness of God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ. It was wrote not long before his decease; for he expressly says towards the beginning of it, that he should shortly put off his tabernacle, as the Lord Jesus Christ had shewed him*. So that if age experience and the solemnity of approaching death, may be supposed to add any weight to the advice of an inspired apostle; the words of the text which stand thus at the close of the epistle, do on these accounts claim our most serious and affectionate attention.

With great earnestness he had just cautioned us, for to us he addresses himself as well as the primitive Christians, against apostacy. A caution peculiarly seasonable, as it had been the main business of the epistle to expose the impieties errors and declensions of the last times, and to represent the solemn process of the last judgment. *Seeing therefore, beloved, ye know these things, beware lest ye being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.* On the contrary, let me beseech you with my dying breath, and the rather as it will be the most effectual security against apostacy, to make it your solicitous concern *to grow in grace.*

* Chap. i. 14.

By grace is sometimes meant the love and favor of God, sometimes the gospel in opposition to the law, and sometimes the inward experience of religion. In this last sense it is to be understood here. So that to grow in grace is to improve in the divine life, or in those dispositions affections and virtues which constitute a real Christian. Now that there are degrees of grace, or that the religion of the heart is capable of improvement, will hardly admit of a question. Grace as to its nature is the same in every good man, but as to its degree it greatly differs. Otherwise whence the descriptions, which so frequently occur in scripture, of sheep and lambs, of new born babes, children, young men and fathers in Christ? And whence is it the apostles speak in their epistles of feeding some with milk, and others with meat? Nay this is evidently supposed in all those passages, wherein our Saviour is represented as condescending to the weaknesses of his people, and adapting himself to their various different capacities. The sheep he leads and the lambs he carries in his bosom. And the figure alluded to in our text sufficiently proves and illustrates what I am here observing. *Grow in Grace.*

Grace

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Grace is at first like a tender plant, which makes an unpromising appearance, and is in danger of being nipped by every sudden blast: yet in time it grows, gathers strength, spreads its leaves, and becomes capable of enduring the sharpest weather. *It is like a grain of mustard-seed, which, as our Saviour says speaking of the kingdom of heaven, is indeed the least of all seeds, but when it is grown is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof*^a. Steadiness and experience are the perquisites of age; and a considerable time will pass, ere the principles of grace take deep root in the heart, and the blossoms of early religion ripen into fair and substantial fruit. Which being the case, there is sufficient ground for the idea suggested in our text. And however growth in religion is to be ascribed to a divine influence; yet it is with good reason made a subject of exhortation, since that influence is only to be expected in the use of means, which are unquestionably within our compass. What I propose therefore in this discourse is,

I. To recite and explain some of the principal means of religion;

^a Matth. xiii. 31, 32.

II. To

II. To lay down some plain rules to direct us in our use of them ; and,

III. To attempt by proper motives to excite our attention to them.

I. As to the means of religion. There are some of a more general kind, and which have immediate respect to our daily temper and behaviour ; and others which come more directly under the notion of religious duties. Of the former kind the first I shall mention is,

1. Watchfulness against all occasions of sin. This indeed, to speak properly, is rather a means to prevent the decay of religion, than to promote its growth and improvement. Grace and sin are in direct opposition to each other. And could we suppose the Christian capable of wilfully indulging his corruptions, such indulgence would quickly sap the foundation of all good dispositions and affections, and endanger, to say the least of it, a total apostacy. But though it is promised sin shall not have dominion over him, yet he is liable to be surprized into sin. And every act of sin, besides the pain and misery it occasions, tends to strengthen the principle whence it proceeds,

ceeds, and of consequence to weaken the opposite principle of grace and religion. All occasions therefore or temptations leading to this great evil should be carefully guarded against.

Now to be properly apprized of these is one great and eminent part of our duty. There is indeed no object we are conversant with but may become an occasion of sin. Which makes it necessary that we keep a strict watch on all our passions appetites and senses. But there are certain connections amusements and concerns of life, which though not absolutely unlawful in themselves, may prove snares to us. To recite them particularly would be endless, because they are almost infinitely diversified. Be they however what they may, we should at least give ourselves time to consider of them, and the danger to which they may expose us, before we have any thing to do with them. And unless we are clearly warranted to engage in them, and have sufficient ground to believe we shall be superior to the temptation of them, it is unquestionably our duty to stand at a distance from them. Good men are usually in greater danger from the occasions and appearances of sin, than from the open attacks of sin itself.

itself. Direct solicitations to criminal actions they will peremptorily withstand, when perhaps through a presumption of their own strength, and a vain notion of not expressly violating any known law, they will be easily induced to venture on what hath a remote tendency to such actions.

Now when this is the case, when one who calls himself our friend presses us on fair pretences to associate with evil company, to divert ourselves with idle amusements, to which we have no sufficient call either by reason or providence, or for the sake of worldly gain, to enter into this or the other connection that is forced and unnatural; if we were to make a bold stand, and absolutely refuse to comply, what a deal of mischief might we not prevent — prevent all those sad languors of a declining constitution, and those bitter sorrows and reflections of heart we so often feel and lament! Watchfulness therefore, constant watchfulness, is indispensably necessary to this end. *My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not^t. Let him who thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall^s. Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation^t.*

^t Prov. i. 10.

^s 1 Cor. ix. 12.

^t Matth. xxvi. 41.

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2. Another still more direct means of improvement in religion is self-knowledge. There can indeed be no real religion without it. The right exercise of every Christian temper, whether towards God ourselves or one another, supposes it and depends greatly upon it. But alas ! this of all sciences is the most difficult to be attained. And it having been in a degree attained, at our first becoming Christians, we yet for the most part make but a very slow progress therein. The principal reasons of which are doubtless these, a certain consciousness we each of us have that we are not what we ought to be, which makes us averse to an acquaintance with ourselves ; and a continual busy intimacy with sensible objects, which diverts our attention from reflection and self-examination.

Now there are two rules, which if duly attended to, would be of excellent use to promote self-knowledge. The one is the enuring ourselves to watch the motions and operations of our hearts. And the other is the making it our business at certain periods to look back on our past temper and conduct. It is I know extremely difficult, and perhaps absolutely impossible, for a man on every occasion to possess himself of his own
2 thoughts,

thoughts, that is to reflect minutely and immediately on transactions which have just passed in his breast. So various are the concerns of life, and so quick are the reasonings of the mind upon them, that were we every minute to make a pause, and solemnly call up to our view what had at that instant escaped us, the necessary business of our stations would be considerably impeded if not wholly obstructed. Yet there is such a thing as a man's being accustomed to keep a guard upon himself, and his making a point of it to watch the temper of his heart upon critical occasions. By critical occasions I mean those wherein our integrity, and our religious regard to God and our duty, are put to any remarkable trial. A facility in this practice is what some Christians, with divine assistance, have acquired in a very happy degree.

The advantages which result from hence are obvious at first view. Were we, for instance, narrowly to observe our own reasonings when solicited to a matter about the lawfulness of which we were doubtful, or carefully to eye our tempers when engaged in any solemn religious duty; we could hardly fail reaping some considerable addition to self-knowledge. And though such strict

observation of ourselves might be fruitful of many unpleasing reflections ; yet these reflections would lay an immediate foundation for godly sorrow, which is one eminent branch of religion, and would teach us many a useful lesson for the regulation of our future conduct. Humility, self-diffidence, the need we stand in of divine grace, and our obligations to exercise candor charity and tenderness towards our fellow-christians, are instructions which would infallibly arise out of the due discharge of this duty. And then on the other hand, being so happy as to discover in the main our own sincerity and uprightness, how should we feel that rejoicing of which the apostle speaks ^u, springing from the testimony of our consciences that in simplicity and godly sincerity, by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world ! The like advantages would also result from the making it our practice, at certain stated seasons, to reflect on our past general behaviour : not to say how the enuring ourselves to these exercises would in time contribute greatly to the rendering them easy and in a sort habitual. *I thought on my ways, says David, and turned my feet to thy testimonies* ^w. And his complaint — *Who can understand his errors* ^x ?

^u 2 Cor. i. 12.^w Ps. cxix. 55.^x Ps. xix. 12.

shews

shews as well his solicitous concern to detect them, as his sense of the extreme difficulty of the duty. — Self-knowledge then is an important means of growth in grace. As is also,

3. A diligent observation of the ways of providence. There is a providence that governs the world in general: and however mysterious some of its proceedings may be, yet such events of a public kind frequently take place, as clearly demonstrate the wisdom justice and goodness of him, who presides over the universe, and doth all things according to the counsel of his own will. The divine influence in these events is I know little regarded by the generality of mankind, and so they lose the benefit of such reflections. But were we accustomed as Christians religiously to observe that influence, many striking occasions would offer for the exercise of confidence in God, reverence of his perfections, and submission to his will. And how mightily all this would contribute to growth in grace I need not say.

But what I have here chiefly in view, is a regard to Providence in our own personal affairs. We believe that there is not a hair of our head but is numbered, and that not a

sparrow falls to the ground without the knowledge and permission of our heavenly Father. Now if in every occurrence, especially those of a remarkable and interesting nature, we were steadily to eye the hand of God; sure I am the eye would quickly affect the heart, and that in a very lively and sensible manner. Suppose for instance some grievous disappointment to happen to us; what in this case would be the effect? Why, an immediate fixed persuasion that it is of God, would put us directly upon inquiring into the causes or motives of his conduct towards us. And having discovered something amiss in our temper or life, which this affliction was designed to correct, we should be induced not only to submit patiently to the affliction itself, but to humble ourselves for the sin that had occasioned it, and henceforth to abstain from it. Thus curses would become blessings, and what would otherwise be poison to our perverse and obstinate spirits, would prove the most salutary medicine for the recovery and confirmation of our health.

And on the other hand, it is obvious at first view, that a diligent and accurate observation of the influence of providence in our successes, would greatly tend to sweeten
the

the enjoyments of life, and at the same time prevent the undue effects of prosperity, by raising our affections to God, confirming our faith in his power and goodness, and disposing us to gratitude and obedience. And thus would the habit of religion in the heart be mightily strengthened cherished and improved. The utility of this practice David sensibly felt, as appears from innumerable reflections of this sort which occur in the book of psalms. And it was doubtless by an attention to these rules, that the great apostle learned in whatever state he was how to demean himself. I will add,

4. That the realizing the great events of death and eternity, will have a mighty effect, with the blessing of God, to promote the life and spirit of religion. Death is the common lot of all mankind. We have none of us the shadow of a reason to expect an exemption from it; nor do we know when the event will take place. Be the time however when it may, we are sure the scene will be most solemn: it cannot be beheld even at distance, without commanding an awe upon our spirits. Death is the dissolution of an union the most dear and intimate in nature; it puts an end to all our present connections and pursuits; leaves the

body in a state of inactivity and putrefaction; and hurries the soul into a world, to us as yet unknown, but which we are certain will, at that important instant, pour unutterable bliss or woe upon the separate spirit. Amazing change! To the good man how pleasing! — to the sinner how tremendous! Nor shall the body remain for ever a prisoner of the grave. A day hath God appointed in which he will judge the world: and on that day, ushered in by a voice louder than that which shook mount Sinai, death and hell shall deliver up their dead, the scattered remains of millions of beings shall be collected, and the immortal spirit again possess the habitation it had forsaken. To the astonished sight of this prodigious multitude the Son of God shall instantly appear in the clouds of heaven, with a splendor on his countenance far surpassing that of the sun, and attended with myriads of angels in all their glory. Before his dread tribunal every individual shall be summoned; exact scrutiny shall be made into their several characters and actions; judgment shall be immediately given; and so amidst the solemnities of an expiring world, the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal.

Now a believing contemplation of these important events will have a direct and powerful tendency to inspire our breasts with a dread of sin, to moderate our affections to the world, to make us patient of affliction and suffering, and to animate us to the duties of our several stations. How can religion dwindle into a mere form, under the frequent and lively impressions of such great and interesting realities, as death judgment and eternity! Hence it is these considerations are with such earnestness pressed upon us in scripture. *Behold I come, says Christ himself, as a thief. Blessed is he who watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame*¹. *And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch*². *Be ye also ready, for in such hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh*³. And seeing ye look for such things, says the apostle Peter in this context wherein he had been describing the solemn transactions of the last day, *Be diligent that ye be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless*⁴.

Such then are some of those means of a more general kind, which, if duly regarded,

¹ Rev. xvi. 15.

² Mark xiii. 37.

³ Matth. xxiv. 44.

⁴ Ver. 14.

will

will with the blessing of God contribute not a little to our growth in grace. To which I would now add the more particular and positive duties of religion. And of these the first I shall recommend is,

1. A frequent and diligent perusal of the bible.

This sacred book is put into our hands, as the inspired writers of it assure us, for *our reproof correction and instruction in righteousness ; to make us wise unto salvation ; to furnish us thoroughly unto all good works^c ; and to build us up, and give us an inheritance among them that are sanctified^d*. Here we are led into the knowledge of God ourselves and the way of salvation. Here we have life and immortality brought to light, and the realities of a future world, of which we have just been speaking, presented clearly to the eye of our faith. Here we are instructed in our duty, urged to it by the noblest motives, and directed where to obtain assistance for the right discharge of it. All necessary truths are here revealed, exceeding great and precious promises are here given us, and the most illustrious and animating examples set before us for our imitation.

^c 2 Tim. iii. 15, 16, 17.

^d Acts xx. 32.

Now

Now as it is by this good word of God which liveth and abideth for ever, that men are begotten to a new and spiritual life ; so it is by this word principally that that life is nourished and maintained. *Desire the sincere milk of the word*, says the apostle Peter, *that ye may grow thereby, if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious*^c. By the streams that flow from this pure fountain, the grace which is of divine implantation is watered and refreshed, and so flourishes and becomes fruitful. Wherefore the frequent and serious use of the bible is of the last importance. It should be read, meditated upon, treasured up in the heart, and applied to practice. Is there, can there be, a Christian who doth not make conscience of reading the scriptures? Which of us would carelessly throw aside a letter sent us by a friend we esteem and love, written with his own hand, sealed with his own seal, directed immediately to us, and the contents of which we were in general persuaded were highly interesting and important ; — which of us I say would throw such a letter aside carelessly without reading it ? How much less is it to be imagined, that the Christian can treat that living epistle, which the blessed God

^c 1 Pet. ii. 2, 3.

himself hath vouchsafed to send him, in this light and contemptuous manner? A suspicion of this sort is methinks hardly to be admitted. The matter rather is, that some Christians do through temptation neglect the reading it so regularly attentively and seriously, as is their unquestionable duty. And hence it is they reap so little benefit from it.

Would you then grow in grace? read the bible frequently — have stated seasons for reading it — collect your wandering thoughts and passions while you are reading it — consider well that it is the word of the living God you read, and that by the contents of it you are one day to be tried — read it with a view to profit by it — endeavour to lay it up in your memory — in fine, pray to God to enable you to transcribe it into your life. And the word thus read, I may be bold to affirm, will do you real good. So it was the psalmist made this sacred book, imperfect as the canon of scripture then was, the man of his counsel; entertaining himself with it as his song in the house of his pilgrimage. How happy for us did we conscientiously imitate his example!

2. The fellowship of good men is another means of religion.

By

By this I intend the making them our acquaintance, communing with them in sacred ordinances, and on particular occasions conferring intimately with them on the things of God. Much certainly depends on the company we keep. By this one circumstance, it is commonly observed, the tempers and morals of mankind are formed more than by any other besides. We almost insensibly imbibe the spirit, and copy after the example of those with whom we intimately converse. Hence it was the complaint of a good man, while he lamented the degeneracy of the world and the difficulty of finding agreeable persons to associate with, “ That he always came out of the company “ of men less a man than he entered into “ it.” But degenerate as the world is there are men of virtue and religion to be met with. And though it is not in the power of such persons to communicate grace, or to stamp the divine image on our hearts ; yet if we are already possessed of the grace of God, as that will dispose us to covet such acquaintance, so we shall be likely to reap very essential advantage from it. Familiarity with men of this character, though we are not always talking of our religious

^f Ex hominum consortio semper venio minus homo.

concerns,

concerns, will have a happy effect to soften our tempers, to promote Christian love, and to induce us to caution and circumspection in our conduct. Having examples of piety simplicity and goodness continually before us, we shall by these means be animated to our duty, and stand reprov'd when we do amiss. David tells us that *in the saints, the excellent in the earth, was all his delight*^g. He felt real pleasure in their friendship, and reaped singular profit from their counsel and from the pattern they set him. — Communion with them likewise in holy ordinances will be of mighty use to excite our devotion, strengthen our engagements to God, bind us to the interests of religion, and restrain us from sin. Thus we find the zeal and love of the primitive Christians were considerably assisted and promoted by their continuing stedfastly, as it is expressed, in fellowship, and assembling frequently together^h.

To which I must add, the freely opening our minds to one another, at fit seasons, upon matters of religion. The right management of Christian conversation requires indeed both prudence and resolution; — prudence, since it would be improper to unbosom our hearts to every good man, and

^g Pf. xvi. iii.

^h Acts ii. 42.

at every interview we may have with him: — and resolution, since shyness, if not indifference to religion itself, is too apt to hold us back from the practice of this duty at all. Had we some experienced friend with whom we could be perfectly free, and were we watchful to seize every favourable opportunity that offered for discourse of this sort, we should doubtless find our account in it. The psalmist had his friend with whom he took sweet counsel, and in whose company he was used to go up to the house of the Lord. So was he frequently relieved of many discouraging doubts which perplexed his mind, and of many sad burdens which oppressed his heart. *As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the countenance of a man his friend*¹. And the sympathy, to say no more of it, which arises out of such discourse prudently managed, hath often an amazing effect to soothe the breast and invigorate the spirits. An assemblage of fair plants in a garden we shall see flourish and grow in such connection, while perhaps a flower detached from the rest languishes and dies. — From Christian society I go on to mention,

3. The duties of public worship.

¹ Prov. xxvii. 17.

That

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That God is to be worshipped in a social way, is a plain dictate of reason and conscience, and hath the support and consent of the far greater part of mankind. Go where we will we see some temple erected for the service of God—some house wherein men agree to meet for the purposes of religion. Nor hath scripture left us to plan out the forms of these public exercises for ourselves. Prayer and praise, accompanied with suitable instructions from the word of God, are the main branches of social worship. And the assembling ourselves together weekly for such ends is solemnly enjoined upon us. Now this being the case, the forsaking these assemblies, as is the manner of some, can never surely be compatible with a growth in grace. Nor is it imaginable that they who do but now and then attend them, at a late hour, in a formal way, and with little concern to profit by what they hear; I say it is hardly imaginable that such persons should make any considerable progress in religion. A practice the reverse of this is what a real concern for the welfare of our souls teaches. *They who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God, they shall bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing.*

rishing^k. David expresses his ardent *desire to dwell in the house of the Lord*^l. And Christ assures his faithful disciples to the end of the world, that *where two or three are gathered together in his name, he will be in the midst of them*^m.

Nor must I here forget earnestly to recommend the two positive institutions of baptism and the Lord's supper; which are not only designed to be public expressions of our faith in Christ, and to be the means of preserving alive the knowledge of his religion in the world, but are evidently adapted to cherish and promote the interests of vital godliness in the hearts of individuals. Baptism, which is an initiating ordinance, and by which we declare ourselves the willing disciples of Jesus, lays us under such personal obligations to him, as, when duly reflected on, may be justly supposed to have a powerful influence on our tempers and lives. To this purpose we find the apostle reasoning with the Romans on their solemn engagements in baptism — *How shall we who are dead to sin live any longer therein? Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried*

^k Ps. xcii. 13, 14.

^l Ps. xxvii. 4.

^m Matth. xviii. 20.

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with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life". And several other passages we have of the like import. Would we then grow in grace? this ordinance should be submitted to as a means to that end, as well as an acknowledgment, in obedience to the divine command, of the grace we have already received.

And as to the Lord's supper, whoever considers the peculiar circumstances of tenderness which attended the institution of it, the care taken in scripture both by precept and example to urge us to a frequent participation of it, and the infinitely important events and doctrines it was designed to bring near to our view, and to impress upon our hearts; will clearly see as well its reasonableness and utility, as its divine and positive authority. On what occasion may we more naturally expect the spiritual presence of Christ, than when he is thus by the memorials of his death, which he hath himself instituted, evidently set forth crucified among us? And when he is in the midst of us by his Spirit, how happy the effect in all that peace joy and pleasure we feel!

^a Rom. vi. 2—4.

and

and in all that influence which his grace hath upon us, to bind our hearts to God and one another, and to quicken us to duty and obedience ! Can he then expect to make any progress in religion, who treats this sacred appointment with indifference and neglect.

But it is farther to be observed of the duties of public worship, that their efficacy under God to the great purposes that have been mentioned, depend not a little upon a serious review of them afterwards. Some, it is to be feared, deprive themselves of the benefit which would result from the instructions of one public duty, by hurrying too quickly into another, and so not allowing time for reflection. And what is still worse, others suffer the good impressions made upon their hearts to be quickly erased, by instantly mingling with vain and trifling company. A serious attention therefore to the duties of the family and the closet on the evening of that day especially which is devoted to public worship, I look upon as a very important and indeed necessary means of edification. *Earnest heed should we give to the things we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip* ° ; and if we duly consider what

° Heb. ii. 1.

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is said, we may hope God will give us understanding^p. Which leads me,

4. And lastly, To recommend prayer as the most essential and important of all those means of religion which have yet been mentioned.

Prayer is the offering our desires to God in the name of Christ. Now as the desires, the native genuine desires of a truly Christian heart, are the main part of internal religion; so the actually presenting them to God, and that frequently in this duty, hath a manifest tendency to strengthen these springs of action, and to promote the spirit and energy of vital godliness. The divine affections of the soul thus exercised shoot up, expand, blossom and ripen into fruit. Say, Christians, what grief for sin — what hungry and thirsting after righteousness — what aspirations of heart towards God — what hope in his mercy — and what peace and joy in a sense of his favor, have you not some times felt springing up in your breast, whilst pouring out your cries to God? And hath not this happy experience an immediate effect to establish and invigorate all the powers of religion in the soul?

^p 2 Tim. ii. 7.

Besides,

Besides, as the influences of the Spirit are necessary to our growth in grace, and as by the divine appointment they are to be expected in this way, so from hence the utility and importance of prayer farther appears. God has commanded us not in general only to implore all needful blessings, but in particular *to ask his Spirit*, assuring us that this our request shall be granted^a. And we are invited to come boldly to the throne of grace, not only to obtain the pardon of our sins, but *to find grace to help in time of need*^r. How then can we expect to prosper in religion if we neglect this duty? Indeed if the neglect be habitual, I do not see how we can be supposed to have any religion at all? For as well may a man live without breathing, as be a Christian without praying. — Pray to God therefore, Sirs, not in public only, but in your families and your retirements. Be not contented with having a place of worship to which you may resort weekly in company with others; but in the tents which God has pitched for you erect an altar to his service. Neither let the devotion of the family suffice you: but make conscience of pouring out your hearts

^a Luke xi. 13.

^r Heb. iv. 16.

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to Heaven morning and evening in private. *Enter into your closet, (they are the words of Christ himself) and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who seeth in secret, shall reward you openly* *. These are some of the principal means of growth in grace.

* Matth. vi. 6.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE XI.

PART II.

HAVING recited the principal means of improvement in religion, I proceed now,

II. To lay down some plain rules for our direction in the use of these means.

1. Be serious in the discharge of religious duties.

It is sad to think how little progress some Christians make in the divine life, who yet very constantly and regularly attend on most positive institutions. To what, you will say, is this owing? I answer, It is owing to the light careless trifling manner in which they are too apt to acquit themselves on these solemn occasions. Is this the unworthy behaviour of any to whom I

speak? Let me tell you, Sirs, you have no reason to wonder at it that you reap so little profit from your duties. If it is enough for you to read your bible, without understanding the meaning or entering into the spirit of what you read; if you can be satisfied with a bare appearance from week to week in some Christian assembly, without feeling what you hear there; and if it will suffice you to say a few words to God morning and evening, without either a thought or a wish accompanying them; so far is it from being strange that you do not improve in religion, that it is vehemently to be suspected you are utter strangers to it. Yet indifference and formality, though not direct hypocrisy, may I am sensible overtake a real Christian. Be watchful therefore of the first expressions of this great evil in religious duties. — Dread the thought of dealing deceitfully with God. — Set him before your eyes when you are entering upon a duty — Keep him in your view if possible all through it — or however let an habitual reverence of that great Being and of his immediate presence possess your breast. *God is a Spirit, and he will be worshipped in spirit and in truth.* O! did we thus serve him,

John iv. 24.

we

we should assuredly find our account in his service ; not to say how many sad and painful reflections this serious attention to duty would happily prevent.

2. Consider your duty as your privilege.

The treating it in this manner is of great importance to the utility of it. For as no service can be pleasing to God, which is rendered through constraint and from slavish principles ; so neither can it be agreeable nor of consequence beneficial to ourselves. In the common affairs of life, he usually acquits himself the best in any station, who has a turn for the business of it, and takes pleasure in it. Such a man will do more in a day, and to far better purpose, than another in a whole month. In like manner cordiality and chearfulness in matters of religion are of the last moment to the profitable discharge of duty. The real Christian will indeed in the general be well affected to what he knows God hath required of him, there being a principle of grace implanted in his heart. Yet it may so happen, either through melancholy on the one hand, or occasional dissipation of mind on the other, that he may scarcely have any present consideration to prompt him to duty, but the authority which hath enjoined it. And
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when this is the case, the duty he discharges merely from a principle of conscience will be in a degree tedious, and so ineffectual to the end proposed.

Be persuaded therefore to lay it down with you as an unquestionable truth, that this and the other religious exercise is your duty, not as imposed by an express command only, but as being in its own nature adapted to promote your real good. — Keep it carefully in mind, that the Master you serve is not hard and severe, but kind and merciful; that he consults not his own glory alone, but your profit. — Think of the pleasures you have formerly enjoyed in devotional exercises. — Think of the substantial benefits you have reaped from them. — And think of the numerous blessings you may still expect to receive through these means. So will you in all likelihood be roused out of your lethargy, be inspired with a chearful temper, and betake yourself to duty with a vigor and activity which will at once render it both pleasant and improving. Your *heart thus enlarged by the grace of God, you will run the way of his commandments* *.

3. Seize the most favourable opportunities that offer for religious duties.

* Ps. cxix. 32.

The timing a business well, it is often observed, greatly facilitates the success of it. An observation this which may with the same truth be applied to our best concerns, as to those of a civil nature. Our hearts are not always in a like frame, nor are our temporal affairs always alike conveniently disposed for duty. In general, the fittest seasons for meditation and prayer are those wherein the mind is most disentangled from the business of the world, and we can without interruption or the observation of others retire to converse with God and ourselves. The morning and evening are usually in these respects most favourable. But the hour and exact proportion of time, as persons circumstances greatly differ, must be left to every one's prudence to direct: nor have we any positive command respecting these matters; though scripture hath not failed to give us some hints concerning them. *Isaac went out to meditate in the field at eventide*^w. David says, *My voice shalt thou bear in the morning, in the morning will I direct my prayer to thee and look up*^x. And our Saviour on extraordinary occasions spent whole nights in devotion. To Christian prudence also the question must be referred,

^w Gen. xxiv. 63.

^x Ps. v. 3.

respecting

respecting the fit time for family-worship and religious conversation. These matters however properly conducted will greatly contribute to the utility of such exercises.

But what I have chiefly in view under this head, is the right improvement of occasional opportunities for duty. By occasional opportunities I here mean those seasons wherein our attention is roused by the loud and sudden voice of Providence, or our affections are melted and softened into a frame peculiarly suited to the receiving religious impressions. If these happy moments, which are in scripture described as *the accepted time*, and *the time in which God is to be found*, were eagerly seized and carefully improved either by reading meditation or prayer, it is not to be questioned but the Christian would experience a pleasure and profit in them as extraordinary as the occasions of them. His heart thus elevated to God would make him, as it is somewhere expressed, like the chariots of a willing people. And the delightful favor of these devotional exercises would abide upon his spirits many days, not to say what important effects it would produce in his general temper and conduct.

4. Be regular and constant in the discharge of religious duties.

Advice of this sort, in regard of bodily health, is universally approved as salutary and good. Food and exercise are necessary for the support and preservation of life: but neither of them will do us the service for which they were appointed, if they are not properly and seasonably used. In like manner how little profit can they be supposed to reap from public ordinances or private duties, who attend to them but now and then, and just as fancy or passion prompts them? Nay I may add, what great mischiefs must needs ensue upon such irregular intermissions of duty? The strength of the renewed mind will quickly be enfeebled, and its vital powers sensibly languish and decline. I know indeed it is often alledged in excuse for these criminal neglects, that the heart is not in a proper frame for the exalted exercises of devotion, and that therefore they had better be omitted than attempted. But this, to say the best of it, is a very insufficient excuse. For though we ought to be serious and reverend in our approaches to God, yet it is by no means a necessary prerequisite to duty, that our hearts are extraordinarily elevated to Heaven at

our entrance upon it, since to attain such a frame is the end proposed by the duty itself. And if our temper be such as absolutely unfits us for conversing with God, that is our great fault, because it is the effect of some sinful indulgence. And then as to the suspending our obligations to prayer or other religious duties intirely upon supernatural impulses, this is the height of enthusiasm, and when used as an excuse for any neglects on our part, is little better than profaneness, since it is making God answerable for our irregularities.

Be regular therefore and constant in duty.
 — Gather your manna morning and evening.
 — Go with Peter and John up to the temple at the hour of prayer. — Yield not to every trifling excuse: if you do, excuses will increase, and become every day more and more urgent. — Suspect your own heart of treachery, when the want of a suitable frame becomes a temptation with you to neglect stated seasons of devotion. — Turn this device of Satan against himself, by making it a reason with you to implore earnestly divine grace to dispose you to duty. — And while you dread formality, take heed how you are driven by the apprehension of this evil into the opposite extreme of irreligion
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and profaneness. He who makes a point of regularly attending upon divine institutions, and that with a view to his real profit, though he may not always enjoy that pleasure he could wish, will yet assuredly find his account in so doing.

5. Rest not in your duties.

What I mean by this is the cautioning you against laying such a stress upon your duties as shall defeat their true intent. And of this we are guilty when we attend carefully and precisely to the forms of religion, without a due concern to enter into the spirit of them. But of what avail are all the external labors of fasting and prayer and other the most expensive services, if the heart be not engaged in them? Scripture and reason teach that they are not only unprofitable to ourselves but an abomination to the Lord. Beware therefore of formality, and of that most dangerous species of pride, the valuing yourselves upon your strictness and regularity. This is the fly in the pot of ointment which spoils its grateful odor. That confidence likewise in duty, which in the least degree precludes a regard to Christ and the influences of divine grace, is highly pernicious and sinful. Yet how insensibly such a criminal self-complacency is apt to infi-

nuate itself into our hearts I hardly need tell you. And hence that unfruitfulness shame and dejection of spirit we afterwards so sadly lament.

Be watchful therefore, Christians, against this temper. — Let Christ be the grand medium of all your intercourses with Heaven. — Fix your eyes steadily upon him, and expect to be accepted of God alone through him. — Rely on his Spirit for that assistance you need, and give him the glory of it. — Put your duties into the hands of the Angel of the covenant, to be perfumed with the incense of his merit. — And having done all acknowledge yourselves unprofitable servants. Were this our temper, what pleasure might we not enjoy in duty, and what substantial fruits might we not reap from it? I have only to add once more,

6. And lastly, Let there be an agreement between your profession and practice.

It is not possible that a man who makes conscience of the duties I have been recommending should lead an immoral life. To dissuade you therefore from open enormities, after what hath been said, may seem needless. I rather mean to exhort you to such a circumspection decency and, if I may so say, dignity of conduct, as is answerable to your religious

religious privileges. A vain trifling defultory behaviour from day to day, though it be not strictly speaking vicious, is very unbecoming a Christian. Have some object of importance in civil life daily in view. Pursue it with attention. And take care that your hours of relaxation and amusement be so conducted and held under such restraints, as that they may neither hurt your conscience, nor hinder your usefulness. A good man may not only use the blessings of life, but enjoy them: nay and it is his duty to be chearful, as well as serious. The mean however between lightness and severity you should carefully observe. And this will at once reflect a lustre on your religious profession in the view of others, and tend greatly to your own edification and comfort.

Having thus directed you to the proper means of improvement in religion, and laid down certain rules to guide you in the use of them, I should now,

III. Attempt by suitable motives to excite your most serious regards to the exhortations which have been given. But these motives I shall at present do little more than mention, as they will be occasionally discussed in the following discourses. Now,

1. The first which demands our consideration is the end proposed by the use of these means—our *growth in grace*. An end truly noble and important, and which if it were rightly understood as comprehending in it the greatest blessedness, it could not fail of having a powerful effect upon our hearts. And here, in order to fire our zeal and provoke our emulation, I might describe the character of him who excels in religion. I might tell you what real beauty there appears in his countenance and in his general deportment—an amiableness which, while it attracts the esteem and affection of his fellow-christians, demands the respect and reverence of even the wicked themselves. I might tell you what pleasures he feels in his own breast, resulting from a sense of the divine favor and the exalted hope of eternal life. And I might tell you how great a blessing he is to his friends, to the church of God, and to civil society. If therefore you wish to be truly happy honourable and useful, let it be your concern above all things to grow in grace. And then it is to be remembered, as a farther argument to persuade us to diligence,

2. That this object, so highly important, is not to be attained ordinarily without the
use

use of means. There is a manifest suitableness in the means as they have been described to the end. And we are obliged by the divine appointment to the observation of them. *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*^y. And *give diligence to make your calling and election sure*^z. It were therefore the height of presumption, however the power and grace of God may be exerted upon extraordinary occasions, to expect he should depart from his usual measures of administration. As well may the husbandman hope to reap a plenteous harvest from land which he hath taken no pains to cultivate, as a Christian to grow in grace while he lives in the neglect of appointed duties. Nay such a neglect is so far from being in the least countenanced by the doctrine of divine influences, that it plainly argues the want of a true and lively faith in that doctrine. And then,

3. In the use of these means, so fit in their own nature and so evidently of God's appointment, we have the greatest encouragement to hope we shall attain the end. If the promise of him who cannot lie is to be credited, there can be no room to hesitate upon this point. Each of the duties

^y 1 Phil. ii. 12.

^z 2 Pet. i. 10.

that have been recommended is not only urged upon us by divine authority, but hath either directly or indirectly some assurance of success annexed to the due performance of it. Time would fail me were I to refer you to them all, I shall therefore sum up the whole of what scripture hath declared upon this matter in the words of the prophet, *They who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint*.*

And now to apply what hath been said, let each of us seriously inquire,

1. Whether we have the grace of God? The seeds of religion must be first implanted in the heart, before they can spring up and bring forth fruit. Have we then a principle of divine faith? If we have, the natural the genuine the necessary expressions of it will be such as these — abhorrence of sin and sorrow for it — veneration for God and submission to his will — love to Christ and a concern to please him — and a preference of the hopes and pleasures of religion to those of time and sense. There are I am sensible degrees of grace. But its nature is the same in all Christians. And they who

* Isa. xl. 31.

through

through various discouragements are the most backward to pronounce certainly upon their own state, will nevertheless, if they are sincere, be free to declare that their practical judgment is fixed on the side of religion, and that their first and principal desire is directed to the great objects it recommends; while others will bear them witness, that the general course of their lives corresponds with their profession. If then we have the grace of God, let God have the glory of it. If we have it not, O may a firm persuasion of its importance excite an ardent concern to obtain it! Again,

2. Let us inquire, those of us who are Christians, Whether we grow in grace? To determine aright upon this question requires no small judgment attention and impartiality, since through various causes we are prone to pass a false verdict upon ourselves. This mistake we shall be in great danger of making, if either outward prosperity, or spiritual gifts, or the elevation of our passions on certain occasions, are the criterions by which we judge. The prevailing temper of the heart should most certainly be the grand object of inquiry. As therefore there are no dispositions more strongly characteristic of a real Christian

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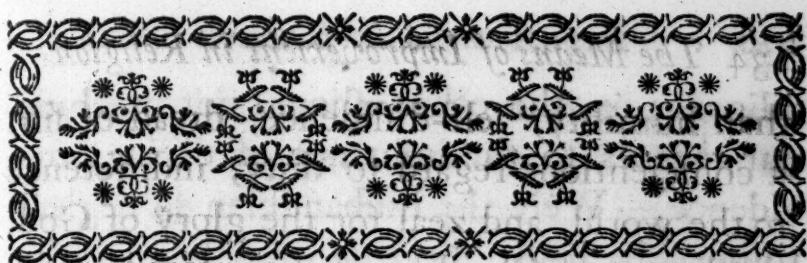
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than humility, self-diffidence, dread of sin, a conscientious regard to duty, indifference to the world, and zeal for the glory of God, the honor of Christ, and the interest of religion ; so our improvement in these graces will furnish the most satisfactory answer to this important question. And if we do indeed prosper in religion, we shall be sensible that our prosperity is owing to those divine influences, which have concurred with the means appointed to that end. Let us therefore make our humble and chearful acknowledgments to the Spirit of all grace, be careful to walk worthy of our high calling, still press on towards perfection, and, amidst the many remaining infirmities which daily afflict our hearts, comfort ourselves with an assured hope, *That he who hath begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ* ^b.

^b Philip. i. 6.

DISCOURSE



DISCOURSE XII.

Improvement in Religion the Fruit
of a divine Influence.



PART I.



HOSEA xiv. 5.

I will be as the dew unto Israel. —

THE great Author of nature hath
so framed mankind, and so dis-
posed the affairs of human life,
as that on the one hand, our de-
pendance on him should not at all lessen
our obligations to diligence ; and that our

diligence on the other, should not preclude our regards to the influence of divine providence. Were the husbandman to neglect tilling his land, because, not having the weather at his command, he cannot secure a fruitful crop ; every one would pronounce his conduct as weak, as it would be unquestionably criminal. For he who doth not sow, will assuredly not reap ; unless a miracle intervene, which it were the height of madness to expect. Whereas he who does his duty, though he cannot be certain of a prosperous event, may upon very reasonable considerations hope for it. So that no inference is to be drawn from the belief of a providence, that is the least unfavourable to industry.

And on the other hand, he acts a part equally foolish and sinful, who builds his future prospects wholly upon his own prudence and labor. For as it is an undoubted truth, that the concurrence of an external influence, which is not under our controul, is absolutely necessary to secure success ; so a profane disregard and contempt of that influence, must be highly provoking to God, and may justly occasion a suspension of it. This sometimes happens. And in such case all a man's toil proves fruitless, and he
has

has the additional distress of having incurred guilt thereby. And though God does not always take advantage of the impiety of men, to withhold from their endeavours the concurrence of his providential influence; yet what they thus obtain, in defiance as it were of his power and goodness, is sure in the end to prove a curse instead of a blessing. Wherefore let a man be as industrious as he will, if he pays no regard to the providence of God, his conduct is as unreasonable and criminal, as if through a pretended reliance on that providence, he were to abandon himself to sloth and indolence.

These observations may with good reason be applied to the great concerns of religion. In vain do we profess faith in the influence and operations of the blessed Spirit, while we live in the slothful neglect of appointed duties. And on the other hand, it will be to as little purpose, that we industriously apply ourselves to those means of improvement, which were recommended in the former discourse; if at the same time our eye is not directed to the mighty power and grace of God, who alone gives the increase. And it is no small encouragement to the Christian, amidst all the humble and painful labors of duty, that he who hath

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commanded him *to grow in grace*, hath also assured him, as in the text, that *he will be as the dew unto Israel*.

These words were indeed primarily addressed to the Israelites, that is, to the ten tribes who were separated from Judah and Benjamin in the days of Rehoboam : yet they are not of private interpretation, but may be applied to all in similar circumstances. It will however be of use, for explaining the passage and throwing still farther light on the general argument before us, to take a transient view of the character and circumstances of this people, at the time the prophet thus addressed them. They were the people of God in a sense peculiar to themselves and different from other nations ; God having taken them under his special government and protection, and been used by extraordinary means to defend and save them. So that the idea of a providence was interwoven with their civil constitution, and a dependance upon it was the first expression of obedience required of them. Wherefore the putting their trust at any time in an arm of flesh, to which they were ever prone, was justly considered as a breach of their allegiance to God their King, and a forfeiture of his favor and protection : not

to say how it became the source of every other impiety, and so in the end drew after it very fatal consequences.

In the guilt of this sin, and the miserable effects of it, they were now plunged. The prophet Hosea therefore being sent to awaken them to repentance, puts them upon making such humble confessions, and forming such new resolutions, as were suited to the kind of guilt they had contracted. *Take with you words, and turn to the Lord. Say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously, so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur, that is, the Assyrians with whom they had sought alliance, shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses, that is, trust in warlike preparations; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our Gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy^c.* To which acknowledgments he represents the blessed God as immediately replying, *I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.* “Your infidelity self-confidence and impiety have almost proved
“ your ruin. They have defaced your
“ beauty and glory, and reduced you to a

^c Ver. 2, 3.

“ languishing dying state. But I will have
“ mercy on you. That extraordinary pro-
“ vidence which formerly interposed in your
“ favor, shall again make you prosperous
“ and happy. On you shall the dews of
“ my salvation descend ; and so shall this
“ withered plant recover its strength and
“ vigor, and again bring forth fruit to my
“ glory.”

And how justly may this reasoning with the Israelites of old, be applied to the church of God under the present dispensation, of which they were an eminent type ! That confidence in divine providence which was required of them, as an expression of their allegiance to heaven in their civil capacity, was a distant but natural intimation of that faith which is required of us in Christ our King and Saviour, and in the influences of the holy Spirit which he hath obtained for us. And as their failure in point of duty to that extraordinary providence they were under, was the unhappy cause of all their declensions and miseries ; so ours, in regard of that confidence we ought to place in the power and grace of God, is the sad source of all the declensions and miseries we at any time feel and lament as Christians. Wherefore, under these circumstances, the like
acknow-

acknowledgments are due from us, both in our individual and collective capacity, as from them. The first step we are to take, is to be deeply humbled for this great error, which is the cause of all our wanderings from God, even confidence in ourselves, and a disregard to the influences of his Spirit. And thus returning to him by prayer and repentance, we may hope for the same favourable answer they received, *I will heal your backsliding, I will love you freely; for mine anger is turned away. I will be as the dew unto Israel.*

Now by the blessing here promised we are to understand the influence of divine grace; — that secret invisible and powerful influence, whereby the word of God, his ordinances, and providences, are made effectual to promote our knowledge happiness and purity; — that influence which impresses divine truths upon our minds, raises our hearts and affections to Heaven, cheers and refreshes our fainting spirits, quickens and animates us to duty, forms us into the likeness of God, and makes us meet for the everlasting enjoyment of him in the world above. And the more emphatically to express the divine agency herein, God is pleased to declare that he will *himself* be as the dew

dew unto Israel. So the psalmist, speaking as is generally thought of our Lord Jesus Christ, says, *HE shall come down like the rain upon the mowen grass; as showers that water the earth*^d. Now what I propose is only,

I. To illustrate this subject, by shewing you why these divine influences are compared to the dew; and,

II. To make some practical reflections.

I. Why are the influences of divine grace compared to the dew?

The dew is a mist, or thin small kind of rain, which falls upon the earth morning and evening, in a very gentle gradual imperceptible manner; and so refreshes the ground and makes it fruitful. In some countries, especially the eastern, it is a great deal more plentiful than with us, and for several months together supplies the place of rain. It hath been generally esteemed therefore a very great blessing, and is often in scripture so represented. Thus when Isaac blesses his son Jacob he says, *God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine*^e.

^d Ps. lxxii. 6.

^e Gen. xxvii. 28.

And

And when Moses blesses the tribe of Joseph he says, *Blessed of the Lord be his lands for the precious things of heaven, for the dew^f. And on the other hand the with-holding it is mentioned as a curse, Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew upon you^g.*

Now there are three views in which we may consider the dew as a just and natural emblem of the influences of the Spirit. It is so in regard, first, of its origin; secondly, of the manner in which it falls; and thirdly, of its use.

FIRST, As to its origin. The dew comes down from above: whence it is frequently called, *The dew of heaven*, and *the heavens are said to drop down dew^h*. Indeed strictly speaking it is a vapor exhaled from the earth and waters. But as this vapor is carried up into the air, and from thence falls upon the ground, it may very well be described as coming from above and from the heavens. Nor is it the effect of human art and power, but a wise provision of the God of heaven for watering the earth and making it fruitful. And hence, among other wonders of his power which the great God mentions in his discourse with Job, he thus challenges

^f Deut. xxxiii. 13. ^g 2 Sam. i. 21. ^h Deut. xxxiii. 28.

him concerning the rain and the dew, *Hath the rain a father? or who hath begotten the drops of the dew*¹?

In like manner the influences of the Spirit are from above, and come down from God. They are the effects, not of human wit or energy, but of divine wisdom power and goodness. And they are absolutely at God's disposal, and under his direction and controul. And who shall question this? To deny that there is a secret invisible mighty influence, which at some seasons especially quickens the heart of a good man and animates him to his duty, is in effect to deny all religion. And to ascribe this influence to a man's own will and agency, is not only to contradict the evident testimony of scripture, but to admit difficulties which are not to be satisfactorily accounted for on any one principle of nature or reason. No man, I think, will dare affirm that God, who is a Spirit, cannot have access to the spirits which he hath made; or that there is any the least absurdity in supposing, that if he please he can impress the mind with a firm and lively belief of future and invisible things, incline the will to a chearful compliance with the dictates of his word, soften the

¹ Job xxxviii. 28.

hard heart, and so touch the affections as to make them an effectual spring to action.

And that this is the case may, I think, with great strength of reason be inferred from a plain matter of fact, of which we are frequently the witnesses. The means of religion are manifestly adapted to produce the effects which have been mentioned, just as the sowing and cultivating the ground to make it fruitful. But these means are not alike successful with all who enjoy them. Here is one shall have the evidence of the gospel set before him in the most convincing light, and shall be reasoned and expostulated with in the most lively and affecting manner; and yet he shall continue as stupidly ignorant unbelieving and perverse as ever. While another, who came under the sound of the word with perhaps as great, if not greater prejudices and disinclinations than he, shall go away deeply affected with his future and everlasting concerns, and with such impressions of divine truths on his heart as issue in a saving conversion to God. And so with respect to Christians themselves; how cold and languid are some under the means of grace, while others are sensibly refreshed quickened and animated by those means! The like may be observed

in regard of that darkness and dejection of mind which the best of men on some occasions endure. Here are two, both equally oppressed with fear and melancholy, and both equally desirous to enjoy the sensible comforts and pleasures of religion. They have both recourse to the same means. The one is happily set at liberty from all his fears, while the other goes away with a sorrowful heart, and remains a considerable time longer in this unhappy and afflicted state. How natural the inference! that the benefit which the former reaps from the means of religion, is owing to the kind and seasonable influences of divine grace which accompany them.

But it is not from fact and experience only that we are led into this conclusion. It is the universal and prevailing doctrine of the bible. The bible itself claims our attention as a supernatural revelation, and therefore takes it for granted, as a truth evident to our reason, that God can have, and that he actually hath, access to the hearts of men. Whoever reads the psalms and the other devotional writings of the Old Testament, will see that the divine influences were the common privilege of all good men in the earlier ages of the world, and that it was
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in this way religion was begun and carried on in their hearts. And my time would fail me, were I to cite the most remarkable passages only, which relate to the Spirit of God and his influence, in the New Testament. Nor are we in any danger of ascribing that to God which is the fruit of a weak and depraved imagination, while we are carefully attentive to the tendency and effect of those impressions that are made on our hearts.

The influences then of which we are here speaking are of divine original. They descend like the dew from the heavens. They are from above, and come down from the Father of lights, and the God of all consolation. Is your heart, Christian, humbled under a sense of sin? Are you refreshed with the hopes and comforts of the gospel? Are you animated to duty and obedience? And are you made patient of affliction and suffering? Does the word preached profit you? so that on some occasions especially, you are remarkably chearful and vigorous in your attendance on holy ordinances; and can say with Peter, inflamed with the love of God, and enlivened with his gracious presence, It is good to be here. Are you, in a word, made wiser happier and better by re-

ligious duties ? It is owing to the grace of God, to these dews that descend from the everlasting hills.

SECONDLY, The dew is a natural and fit emblem of the influences of the Spirit, in regard of the manner in which it falls upon the earth. This is very remarkable, and doubtless one main reason of the comparison. It descends gradually — imperceptibly — seasonably — and sometimes very plentifully.

1. It is remarkable of the dew that it falls *gradually*. It comes down, not like the rain in heavy showers, with impetuous violence, carrying every thing before it ; but in an easy soft and gentle manner. This idea Moses adopts when he says, *My speech shall distil as the dew, and as the small rain upon the tender herb* ^k. So, the influences of the Spirit are gradual in their communication, and many times very soft and gentle in their operation on the heart. It is by degrees usually that men are converted from sin to God. And you hardly need be told, that in regard of those who are converted, there are degrees of grace. To this purpose we read

^k Deut. xxxii. 2.

of children young men and fathers in Christ; of plants and cedars in the church of God; of the weak in faith — the tender and feeble-minded, and those who are strong in faith giving glory to God. And as thus improvements in religion are gradual, so are those influences, we may reasonably conclude, by which such improvements are made. It is step by step that God leads on his people, many of them, to farther and nobler attainments in the divine life. Their knowledge faith hope love and joy receive fresh accession of strength and vigor, from the blessing and influence of Heaven on means appointed to that end. Their corruptions are gradually weakened and subdued, and like the Canaanites are driven out by little and little. They are formed by various exercises into the divine likeness, and by degrees made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Numerous passages, were there occasion, I might cite both to prove and illustrate this.

Like the dew, these influences are also soft and gentle in their operation. Their efficacy is indeed sometimes expressed in striking language, and by bold and lively images. So we read of the *exceeding greatness* or hy-

perbole¹ of God's power towards them who believe, according to the working or the energy^m of his mighty power. So the prophet speaks of the word of the Lord being a fire to melt, and a hammerⁿ to break the hard heart : and the apostle, of its being quick and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow^o. But here these influences are represented as gently insinuating themselves into the heart, like the dew into the ground. The kingdom of God cometh without observation : and however some may talk of rapturous joys, extatic visions, and violent agitations of the mind, it is I believe in this more soft and rational way that Christians are usually inclined and prompted to that which is good. The grace of God we may consider as mingling itself, and that in a manner, as I shall hereafter shew you, imperceptible to us, with the reasonings persuasions and motives of his word, and so making them effectual. And hence we frequently in scripture meet with the soft expressions of inclining drawing leading and alluring. Happy they who know what

¹ Τὸ ὑπερβάλλον.^m Κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν. ΕΡΗ. i. 19.ⁿ Jer. xxiii. 29.^o Heb. iv. 12.

these

these operations mean — know them I mean by the effects they produce in the mind! Are your hearts, Christians, at any time melted, and your affections moved with the great considerations of religion? And are your wills sweetly inclined to the choice, and cordially determined to the pursuit, of spiritual and divine objects? Such is the kindly influence of this dew that comes down from above.

2. It falls in a very insensible and imperceptible manner. It is not like the rain which may be seen, or the drops which may be distinguished from each other; but a kind of mist which is hardly to be perceived but by its effects. In like manner the grace of God, or that power which influences the heart, is scarcely to be known or apprehended but by its effects. It is with, as well as upon, the mind that the Holy Spirit operates. There are no new faculties given us, only they are led and directed to their proper objects. And the hand or power that does this is to us invisible, just as it is with the motions of the body: though they are all of them directed by the will, or by some thought that passes in the mind; yet these springs of action are seldom if ever perceived or regarded.

And hence it is that the influences of the Spirit are so frequently in scripture compared to the wind; the operation of which, however certain the fact is that the wind blows, hath puzzled the ingenuity of the acutest philosophers. So you know our Saviour says, discoursing of this very subject to Nicodemus, *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the spirit*^p. And to much the same purpose is what the blind man in the gospel said to the Jews, when he was questioned by them how he came by his sight. How it was he knew not, but this says he I know, that whereas I was blind now I see^q.

Now this being the case, none should object to the truth of this doctrine, the difficulty of fully explaining the manner of it. For as well might a man deny, that there is such a thing as the wind, because he cannot clearly investigate the nature and manner of its operation; or that the soul and body are united, and mutually act upon each other, because he cannot give a satisfactory account to an inquisitive mind how it is. Nor should the serious Christian distress

^p John iii. 8.

^q John ix. 25.

himself

himself with unreasonable fears that he hath not enjoyed these influences, because he cannot tell how they are excited, and in what manner they take effect, or because he cannot talk so confidently of divine impulses, as some vain and presumptuous persons may affect to do. If we possess in any degree the fruits of the Spirit, we may safely attribute them to his agency, though we know not exactly how they were communicated to us. Again,

3. As the dew falls thus gradually and imperceptibly, so likewise most seasonably. The wisdom of Providence herein is very observable, though the fact may be accounted for upon natural principles. At morning and night it descends upon the earth; and at those seasons of the year, when it is most wanted, and when the ground is in the fittest state to receive it. Were it to fall in the day (supposing that would consist with the heat of the sun) it would rather injure the earth than refresh it, especially the tender plants and flowers of the garden. And so as to those parts of the world where it falls in the greatest abundance; it is most frequent when there is no rain, and when the fruits of the ground would absolutely perish and die without it.

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The like may, with still greater admiration and thankfulness, be remarked of the influences of divine grace. These God bestows on whom he will, and at what time he pleases; yet in dispensing them he displays as well his wisdom and prudence, as his generosity and kindness. With respect to the church in general, Who that reflects on the state of things in the first ages of the gospel, but must be struck with the importance and seasonableness of that extraordinary effusion of the Spirit, which distinguished those early times? So were the apostles qualified for the eminent service to which they were called; so were they made superior to all that mighty opposition they met with; and so were their labors crowned with a degree of success that is almost incredible. And if we review the history of the church in later times, we shall see wise and important reasons for those remarkable appearances of the divine influence and grace, with which some ages and countries have been favoured above others. When the scorching beams of persecution have, to appearance, nearly burnt up the profession of the true religion, these dews have descended in large abundance; so that it hath grown and spread and flourished, amidst

amidst the utmost efforts of its enemies to consume and destroy it.

And the like may be observed as to the experience of private Christians. How seasonable those influences which were excited, Sirs, for your conversion to God at first! — a time that, when, if God had not thus interposed in your favor, speedy ruin had perhaps been your lot. How seasonable those influences, which refreshed and comforted you in the day of your distress, when your hearts were ready to faint within you, and your thirsty souls panted for divine consolation! How seasonable *the dew of your youth*^r, which made you lively and vigorous in the service of God! and those dews which have many times since fallen upon you, under the ministration of the gospel, in your attendance upon holy ordinances, and when you have been exposed to some imminent danger and affliction of an outward kind! In a word, as you cannot but remember, so neither can you help admiring, the wisdom and goodness of God, in watering you with his heavenly graces, when the fair leaves of your profession have begun to wither, the fruit to decay, and the interest of religion to decline and die away in

^r Pf. cx. 3.

your souls! — So seasonable are these influences! Once more,

4. The great plenty and abundance in which the dew falls on the earth, in certain places, and at particular seasons especially, is another circumstance worthy of notice in the parallel we are here running. When Hushai, the friend of David, describes the great numbers he would have led out into the field against the enemy, and the mighty execution they would do, he compares them to the dew: *So shall we light upon him*, says he, *as the dew falleth upon the ground*^{*}. To the same purpose the psalmist uses this figure, when he would express the multitude of converts, which should flock in to Christ in the days of the gospel: *Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth*[†]. The atoms indeed, or parts of which the dew is formed, are very small and imperceptible to the eye; yet they are very thick, come down in great abundance, and cover all the ground.

So we may observe of the grace of God, there is a rich abundance of it — *A fulness in Christ*; and it is largely dispensed to Chris-

^{*} Sam. xvii. 12.

[†] Ps. cx. 3.

tians — *They receive and grace for grace**. No supply of art or nature can equal that of the dew. The water the gardener pours upon the plants, can reach but a little way, and is very soon exhausted: but the dew from the heavens is a continual source of nourishment to the earth, and does that in one morning, which the toil of many weeks and months cannot effect. Thus, how rich, how large, how suitable are the dews of divine grace! Without them all our labor is vain; but with them, as will be presently shewn, we shall grow and bring forth fruit. They are also ever ready to be showered on the Christian in a time of need: for as they are of divine contrivance and appointment, God will not fail to grant them, when they are wanted and sought. The fountain likewise whence they proceed is inexhaustible. Notwithstanding the rich abundance of these influences which have been shed upon the people of God, in every age, and in various parts of the world, there is still the same supply at hand. Like the Israelites, we may go every morning out of the camp, and find this dew upon the ground and manna therein". *Let us come boldly,*

* John i. 16.

" Exod. xvi. 12—15.

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says the apostle, *to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*^{*}.

Thus, as the dew falls upon the earth gradually — imperceptibly — seasonably — and plentifully, so do the influences of the Holy Spirit descend upon the Christian.

^{*} Heb. iv. 16.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE XII.

PART II.

WE have seen how properly the dew, in regard of its origin and manner of descent, is an emblem of the influences of divine grace. And we proceed now,

THIRDLY, To consider its use.

The dew is sent to refresh the ground and make it fruitful. To this the fields, the trees, the plants, the flowers, owe their verdure, their beauty, their sweetness, and their fruitfulness. All which is with great softness and elegance described in the verses that immediately follow the text. Nature we here see dressed in all her glory, and the eye, the smell, the taste, are gratified with the most pleasing sensations. The growth of the lily, the stateliness of the cedar, the

beauty of the olive, the verdure of the fir, the revival of the corn, the chearing fruit of the vine, and the aromatic scent of Lebanon, are all attributed to the dew. From which description, applied to the subject before us, we may naturally collect these several effects of the divine influences—— refreshment and comfort——confirmation and establishment——fruitfulness and usefulness——beauty and glory.

1. Divine comfort and refreshment is one happy effect of these spiritual and heavenly influences. *He shall revive as the corn*, says the seventh verse, *and his scent shall be as the wine of Lebanon*. The corn you know dies ere it lives'. It is buried in the ground, and lies there a considerable time as it were lost and gone. But by the influence of the dew and the sun it revives, shoots out from under the thick clod, and promises a large and fair crop. Hence the prophet Isaiah, speaking of the last resurrection, when the body shall spring up from the grave like the corn out of the ground, thus expresseth it, *Thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead*². So, all the vigor and sprightliness that appears in the young plants in spring, all the

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 36.

² Isa. xxvi. 19.

gaiety and chearfulness of their cloathing, and all the sweet fragrance with which they perfume the air, is the effect of these soft showers. The smell of Lebanon must have been exceeding sweet, as there grew the frankincense and aromatics of the most exquisite scent; and the wines that came thence were of the most delicious flavor and generous influence.

Now, as all this sweetness favor and refreshment is the produce of the dew, so that rich consolation which Christians sometimes enjoy, in religious duties, amidst outward afflictions, and in the near views of an eternal world, is the effect of divine influences. The comforts of religion do indeed arise out of considerations hopes and prospects which are most rational, and justly adapted to inspire the heart with them. Nevertheless they are at the disposal, and under the controul of the blessed Spirit: and when they take hold of the heart, so as effectually to refresh and chear it, they are to be ascribed to his gracious energy and operation. And O how reviving are those comforts which spring from a humble confidence that our sins are forgiven, from a well-grounded sense of the favor and love of God, and from a satisfactory hope of

everlasting salvation in a future world! If *the king's wrath*, as Solomon observes, is *as the roaring of a lion*; his favor is *as dew upon the grass*^a. How chearing are these soft and gentle rains, after a long and sad season of barrenness! How enlivening these beams of divine light and heat, after a dark and cold night of affliction! When God giveth quietness, who can give trouble? When he speaketh peace, all is joy and gladness within. This makes duties easy, sufferings tolerable, and the common enjoyments of life doubly chearful and agreeable.

2. Establishment and confirmation is another happy effect of the divine influences on the heart. The dew causes Lebanon, that is, the cedars of it *to cast forth their roots*^b. These trees, for which mount Libanus hath ever been famous, are remarkable for their height strength and durability. Their roots strike deep into the earth, and spread far around; so that the wind can have but little if any power over them. Thus also the influences of divine grace do not only refresh and chear the heart of a Christian, and so spread chearfulness and vigor over his countenance; but

^a Prov. xix. 12.

^b Verse 5.

they

they confirm him in the faith and practice of religion. They cause him to take root downwards as well as to grow upwards. And this surely is a very desirable blessing. *It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace*^c, that is, that it be well-grounded in the essential truths of religion, and be disposed upon right principles to the practice of its several duties.

Scepticism, or a continual habit of doubting, is both unpleasant and hurtful. A man of this character is ever liable *to be tossed to and fro*, as the apostle expresses it, *with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive*^d. And while in this state, the effect of which is usually great confusion of mind and a disagreeable agitation of the passions, he will neither enjoy himself, nor yet make any considerable proficiency in acceptable obedience. In like manner, he who takes the great truths of religion for granted, but enters not into the spirit of them; though he may escape many of those disagreeable anxieties which are the fruit of scepticism, yet he will be cold and languid in his obedience, and will want sufficient ballast within himself to keep him

^c Heb. xiii. 9.

^d Eph. iv. 14.

steady in a time of temptation and danger. Or however he may, like him in the parable who received the seed in stony places, *bear the word and quickly with joy receive it; yet, not having root in himself, he will endure but for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, he will by and by be offended*.*

Now on the contrary, he whose judgment is fully persuaded of the leading truths of religion, and is confirmed therein by their correspondent influence on his temper (which is what the apostle John means by the Christian's *having the witness in himself*†,) that man will bid fair to be chearful steady and uniform in his profession. Feeling his religion at his heart, as well as being convinced of it upon the sound principles of reason and God's word, he will not easily question its truth. It will neither be in the power of infidelity quickly to laugh him out of it, nor of the threats of persecution hastily to terrify him out of it. Like the cedar, he will stand firm amidst the violent storms of adversity, while others are blown away as stubble before the wind. How very surprising hath been the steadiness resolution and perseverance of some

* Matth. xiii. 20, 21.

† 1 John v. 10.

Christians! Many instances of this sort history hath recorded, and some our own eyes have beheld. Nor can we help envying the men of this character that composure of mind they usually enjoy, and that ability and opportunity of doing good which they commonly possess above others.

Now this confirmation in the faith and love of the truth, is one happy effect of those divine influences of which we have been discoursing: for it is by them the Christian is led into the spirit of those great doctrines, wherein his bible hath instructed him; and from thence he collects this strong collateral proof of their divinity. Again,

3. Fruitfulness is another main end for which the influences of divine grace are afforded. It would be to little purpose that the ground were refreshed, and the trees and plants nourished by the falling dew, if they brought not forth their fruit at the proper season. The revival therefore of the corn is mentioned with a view to the crop it produces in harvest; and the growth of the vine, to the clusters with which the hand of the gatherer is filled in autumn. By the one we are furnished with bread which is the staff of life, and by the other with wine which cheers the heart. And *the earth,*

drinking in the dew that cometh oft upon it, bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed^a.

So with respect to the grace of God, he who says in the text, *I will be as the dew unto Israel*, adds in a verse or two afterwards, *From me is thy fruit found*. And it is very desirable and useful fruit which the Christian, under the influence of this grace, produces; good fruit — fruit in its season — and much of it, *either thirty, sixty, or an hundred-fold**. The great principles of religion are not dry useless speculations: nor is it for trifling purposes that the blessed God is at such expence, by his word his providence and his Spirit, to cultivate the barren hearts of men. If there be any worth, any excellence, any utility, in love joy peace long-suffering gentleness goodness faith meekness temperance, these the apostle assures us are *the fruits of the Spirit*^b. And they do exist not in imagination only, but in reality and truth.

Look among your acquaintance, and here and there you will find a man, in whose temper and life these graces are exemplified — a Christian who though he is not free from human frailties, and though he

^a Heb. vi. 7.

* Mark iv. 20.

^b Gal. v. 22.

may not enjoy always the same even cheerful frame of mind; yet is conscientious and uniform in his deportment, and aims at pleasing God and serving his generation. A Christian of whom, if I were more particularly to describe him, I should say, that he is serious and regular in his religious duties, diligent and honest in his civil concerns, sincere and faithful in his friendships — that he is temperate in the use of worldly enjoyments, contented in the station Providence hath assigned him, and patient under the trials and afflictions of life — that he hath the government of his own spirit, not living in strife and contention but meekness and love; not apt to be censorious, but candid and charitable; not puffed up with pride and vanity, but of a humble and condescending temper — that he seeks not his own things but the things of others, feels the distresses of the afflicted, rejoices in every opportunity of doing good, and in a word, makes the glory of God and a conformity to his will the scope and end of his actions. This is the man on whose heart the refreshing dews of divine grace descend: and such are the fruits, the substantial fruits, which every one who is blessed with these influences, will in a greater

or less degree produce. Which leads me to speak,

4. And lastly, of that beauty and glory which religion, thus flourishing under a superior influence, puts upon the real Christian. How fair is the countenance, how cheerful the aspect which nature assumes when refreshed with the morning dew, and gladdened with the rising sun! especially in the spring, when the fields the plants and the flowers are dressed in their richest cloathing; and in autumn, when the corn bows its head to the reapers, and the trees wish to be disburdened of their fruit. There is something amazingly enlivening in these rural prospects; and not only so, but they impress ideas of beauty and greatness on the mind, which are sure to produce answerable affections of admiration and wonder.

In like manner, the presence the dress the deportment of a real Christian, I mean his genuine temper and conduct, cannot fail of captivating the attention and esteem of good men, and commanding respect and awe from even the wicked themselves. The grace of God adds a comeliness to the appearance, and stamps a dignity upon the character of a man, that nothing else whatsoever can do. Who can forbear being struck with the
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native simplicity, the humble boldness, and the unaffected cheerfulness, which sit upon his countenance in whose heart the comforts of religion abound? His face shines. His beauty is like the olive tree. His smell as Lebanon. The fragrance of his graces is like the precious ointment upon the head of Aaron, that ran down his beard, and mingled with the skirts of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion, where the Lord commanded the blessing even life for evermore¹.

What ornament so fair and beautiful as that of a meek and quiet spirit — a mind endued with patience and contentment, with benevolence and love? Not all the adorning of brodered hair, of gold, of pearls, of costly array, is to be once mentioned with good works. These outvie them just as the lilies of the field do Solomon in all his glory. How graceful, in a word, how becoming is their behaviour who, having been with Jesus and learned of him, aim to walk in his steps and imitate his example! *Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely,*

the fruit of a divine Influence. *what-*
Palm cxviii. 2, 3.

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whatsoever things are of good report, on these they think, and these they endeavour to practice *. And surely, *if there be any virtue, if there be any praise*; such fruits of divine grace cannot but reflect real honor upon the Christian, interest him deeply in the affections of those who truly fear God, and fix a conviction of the truth of religion on the consciences of all sober observers.

Thus have we seen how just and natural an emblem the dew is of the influences of the Holy Spirit, in regard of its origin, the manner in which it falls, and its use. Which leads me, as was proposed,

II. To make some suitable improvement of the whole.

i. Does this dew come down from God? Of him then let us earnestly seek it, and to him let us offer our humble thanks for it. The faith of this doctrine is one principal ground of prayer, and is a mighty incentive to it. For who is there that truly believes in the divine influences, and is thoroughly sensible of their importance to the great purposes of the divine life, but will ardently implore them? especially while he keeps in

* Philip. iv. 8.

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view that exceeding precious promise of the bible, that *God will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him* *. Let us labour therefore as much as possible to fix a conviction of this great truth on our minds, and to cherish there a sense of the infinite utility and indeed indispensable necessity of it. So let us make our daily and fervent addresses to Heaven, having our eye directed to the mediation of Christ, and to the merit of his death, whereby he hath obtained the Holy Spirit for us. Nor let us forget, having received an answer in any degree to our prayers, to be truly thankful. It is indeed scarcely possible we should; for it is the very nature of the blessing bestowed to enflame the heart with gratitude and praise. And there are no fitter ways of expressing our sense of the high honor and privilege which are thus conferred on us, than by cordially professing our faith in the doctrine itself, and preserving a holy caution in our behaviour that we act not unworthy of it.

2. Though we receive this dew from above, let us not expect it but in the way of duty. If we do, it is not to be wondered at that we are disappointed. Nay so unreasonable a temper as this furnishes too plain a proof, that we have wrong concep-

* Luke xi. 13.

tions of the doctrine itself, if indeed we may be said to have any faith at all in it. For how is it possible I should have a genuine confidence in this great truth, while at the same time, by living in the wilful neglect of appointed duties, I dare affront that very authority which hath revealed it in the sacred scriptures? Men are therefore deceiving themselves, amidst all the zeal they would seem to express for the influence and operation of the Holy Spirit, if this be the unhappy effect it produces. They imagine they believe it, while they really do not frame any proper idea about it, act unworthy of it, and are in effect enemies to it. Much more easily should I apprehend that man to be a real believer in the doctrine of providence, who regularly pursues the duty of his calling, though he talks not much about his faith; than I should give credit to his loud professions of confidence in divine providence, who all the while lives in indolence and sloth. No. As the right faith of a providence will excite men to diligence in their stations, so will faith in the divine influences excite Christians to the duties of their profession. The ground must be cultivated and the vine pruned, as well as the dew be expected to water them, and the

the sun to refresh and cheer them. In like manner, we are *to work out our salvation with fear and trembling*, while God *worketh in us to will and to do after his good pleasure*¹; and *to labour for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life*, while we are firmly persuaded that it is *the Son of man alone who can give it unto us*^m.

3. How vain are all their pretences to a large experience of these dews of divine grace, who bring forth no suitable fruit in their lives! We should deem it an affront to our reason to be told, that this or that tree which is totally fruitless, and hath no appearance of life in it, is nevertheless refreshed by the falling rain and cherished by the enlivening sun. No less an affront do they offer to the understandings of those about them, who would confidently face them down with bold assurances, that they are under a superior influence, and enjoy pleasures which others are strangers to; while at the same time scarce any of the fruits of truth righteousness and purity, or however of humility meekness and love, appear in their lives. *By their fruits*, says our Lord, *shall ye know them: do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles*ⁿ? And this shews

¹ Philip. ii. 12, 13. ^m John vi. 27. ⁿ Matth. vii. 16.

how little ground there is for that common objection against this doctrine, which is taken from the proneness of many persons to abuse it. For the rule our Lord lays down furnishes sufficient means to prevent any such mistake. Be assured, O vain man, if this be your character, you are under the grossest deception; and the consequence will be most fatal, if your eyes are not opened, nor you in due time brought to repentance. On the other hand,

4. Let the humble serious timorous Christian be comforted — the Christian whose concern it is to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, though through many discouragements he is sometimes ready to question whether he is the happy subject of divine influence. Is it your aim to mortify every evil passion and corruption, and to cultivate every Christian grace and virtue? — to maintain communion with Heaven in the several institutions of religion? — and to fill up the station in which Providence hath placed you, to the glory of God and the good of others? And amidst all, do you readily acknowledge yourself an unprofitable servant, and rely intirely on the divine mercy, through the mediation and righteousness of Christ? I may be bold to affirm from the authority

thority of scripture, that unerring standard of truth, that you have been watered with these dews from the everlasting hills, and that it is from thence your fruit is found. Yield not to the doubts which Satan, which unbelief, or which timidity of natural constitution may suggest. God had not shewn you the things you have seen, nor enabled you to present to him the sacrifice of a broken heart, if he had designed to have destroyed you. He is faithful who hath promised — *A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoking flax he will not quench, till he send forth judgment to victory*^o. Now indeed you sow in tears, but you shall quickly reap in joy. Now you go forth and weep, bearing precious seed, but you shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you^p. And how unspeakable,

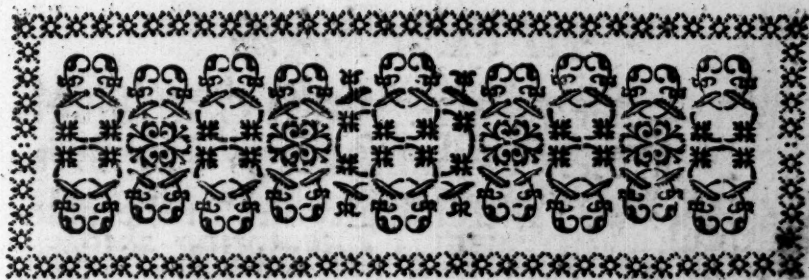
5. And lastly, will be the bliss and glory of the heavenly world, where the effects of these divine influences of which we have been discoursing, shall be enjoyed in their utmost perfection! The paradise of God above is ever fair and green, ever fragrant and fruitful. It is watered with the streams of that river clear as crystal, which proceedeth out of the throne of God and the

^o Matth. xii. 20.

^p Psalm cxxvii. 5, 6.

lamb. And it flourishes under the soft and healing beams of the sun of righteousness, which ever shines upon it. The climate is healthful and pleasant. The spring abides. The plants none of them languish or die, none of them fade or lose any of their beauty and sweetness. They bring forth their fruits in season — the living fruits of peace and love and joy. And God, the inexhaustible fountain of good, is all and in all.

DISCOURSE



DISCOURSE XIII.

The Use of Religion in a Time of
Affliction.

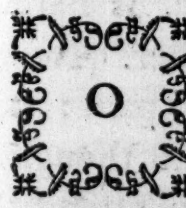


PART I.



PSALM xlv. 10.

Be still, and know that I am God: —

 F all the lessons a Christian hath
to learn none is so difficult, as
submission to the will of God
under affliction. Not that the
duty itself is hard to be explained or under-
stood.

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stood. — Far from it. What God requires of us in these circumstances is easy to be apprehended : the difficulty lies in the practice of it. And that the difficulty is very great, appears not only from the testimony of the wisest and best men who have been exercised with severe trials, but from the reason of the thing —

A desire of happiness is the first and leading principle in the human breast. It is the hinge upon which our whole frame turns : the pulse of the soul : and the spring of all its actions. It is placed upon the throne of our hearts, to direct and influence our conduct. And it is so deeply rivetted in our nature, that no force whatever can tare it thence. Which being the case, it follows that what thwarts or opposes this desire of happiness, or any way seems to have that tendency, must needs throw the mind into great disorder, and become a trial to its resolution and patience. To abstain from pleasure, to which we are so strongly impelled by this principle, is hard work ; but to endure is much harder. Nature starts back at the approach of pain : it shrinks at the very idea of it. And though reason, unassisted by revelation, may attempt to reconcile us to this and the other affliction,

tion, by telling us that what cannot be avoided ought to be quietly endured, and that our pains make way for our pleasures, and serve to heighten and refine them; yet reason falters in her discourse, and for want of sufficient energy to enforce her dictates, often fails in her endeavours to controul the tumultuous passions of the soul. The whole stream of nature therefore being against pain and affliction; it is no wonder that patience, whose business it is to stem the tide and to allay the storm, should be so difficult to be practised.

But, what farther increases the difficulty of a calm submission to affliction, is the wretched depravity of the human heart. This put into the scale with the natural aversion we feel to pain, preponderates almost every consideration that can be offered to soothe the troubled breast. Pride passion and unbelief, joining all their force with that principle of happiness I have been speaking of, raise such a tumult in the mind as can hardly be imagined, but by those who have felt it. Patience in these circumstances seems a grace absolutely unattainable: and the cool faint and abstracted reasoning of a by-stander has little more effect, than the use of oars to a boat tossed

about upon boisterous waves, which every moment threaten its destruction.

Now, it will be acknowledged, these things considered, that to behave with meekness composure and firmness of mind under grievous and pressing afflictions, is a task too arduous to be performed without superior assistance. The great utility therefore of religion at these times, is a subject well deserving of our particular consideration. Religion steps in to the aid of the Christian when all other supports fail. And what gives it the advantage above the reasonings of mere nature, is that it comes cloathed with divine authority. Its voice is the voice of God; the all-commanding voice of him who hath the passions of the heart, as well as the waves of the sea, at his direction and under his controul — *Be still, and know that I am God*. There is a majesty in this language that is inimitable. It is like that of our Saviour, when in a storm with his disciples, he rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, *Peace, be still*; and the wind instantly ceased and there was a great calm^a. And that it has had the like effect on the minds of many in the depths of affliction, hath been sufficiently

^a Mark iv. 39.

attested by scripture and by the best of men in every age. — In order therefore to set the use and importance of religion at such a time in their proper light, let us consider,

I. Our duty as it is here represented
— *Be still.*

II. Our obligations to such a temper and conduct — *I am God.* And,

III. The regard which religion teaches, and divine grace enables us to pay to these considerations. — *Know that I am God.*

I. I am to explain the duty of the afflicted Christian as it is here represented —
Be still.

It is a figurative kind of expression ; and supposes some extraordinary disorder or commotion of the mind and spirits, occasioned by the losses disappointments and troubles of the present life, especially when they come suddenly upon us, and we are unprepared to meet them. The mind is hereby wrought into a violent agitation, just

like the sea when a tempest arises. Innumerable uneasy thoughts, painful sensations and ruffled passions, perplex and distress the heart, spread a gloom over the countenance, disturb our usual peace and serenity, and unfit us both for action and enjoyment. They who have endured affliction in any great degree, from whatever quarter it may have arisen, know well what this means. And by putting ourselves in the situation of persons overwhelmed with this or that particular trouble, we may easily imagine, though not perhaps in so feeling a manner as they, what this state of the mind must be.

It was a distressed condition the good old Patriarch Jacob was in, when the sad tidings were brought him, that his beloved son Joseph was torn to pieces by wild beasts. The tenderest passions of his breast were sensibly touched. *He rent his cloaths, put sackcloth on his loins, and refused to be comforted, saying, I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning*[†]. And apprehending afterwards the loss of Benjamin also, he cries out under this complicated pressure of grief, *All these things are against me*^{*}. — The affliction of Job, that great and good

[†] Gen. xxxvii. 34, 35.

^{*} Chap. xlii. 36.

man,

man, was as uncommon as was the patience with which he endured it. And no doubt he felt this violent agitation of the passions of which I am speaking, though by the grace of God he did not lose the command of them, even when the storm was at its height. One sad story followed another, till he found himself bereft of almost every outward enjoyment. Fire and sword and tempest spread desolation all around him. His body was afflicted with the most loathsome and painful disease. And to compleat the scene, his friends, instead of being his comforters, became his accusers. His own words best describe the tumult of his passions; though his passions, as I said before, did not prevail to his destruction. *O that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! For now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea: therefore my words are swallowed up. For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me¹. — Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me². — The prophet Jeremiah was a man of a compassionate as*

¹ Job vi. 2, 3, 4.

² Chap. xix. 21.

well as a pious heart. And how great was the distress he felt, while his eyes beheld Jerusalem laid waste by the most tremendous judgments, and his countrymen led away, under the frowns of Heaven, into a sad and long captivity! The grief perturbation and anguish of his breast are pathetically expressed, in the Lamentations he penned on that mournful occasion. *I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath*^w. — *Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow which is done unto me, where-with the Lord hath afflicted me, in the day of his fierce anger*^x. — It is a peculiarly tender and affecting scene which the evangelists exhibit to our view, when they relate the circumstances of our Saviour's last conversation with his disciples the night he suffered. With what grief must their hearts have been overwhelmed at the sad tidings, that he was now to take his leave of them, that death awaited him in its most horrible form, and, which was worst of all, that one of them would traiterously betray him, and the rest ungenerously forsake him? Their countenances expressed the inward pangs they felt, while each one with eagerness

^w Lam. iii. 1.^x Chap. i. 12.

put the question, Lord is it I? And yet their sorrows were trifling in comparison with their Master's, who now saw himself just plunging into the depths of affliction and suffering. *I have a baptism, said he, to be baptized with, and how am I straitned till it be accomplished?*!

Now, the pain which the heart feels when exercised with such trials as these, must be very pungent. Nor can any figure better represent the confusion and agitation of the mind on these sad occasions, than that of a storm or tempest, which the text supposes. The psalmist adopts this metaphor, when he would describe the tumult of his passions on a similar occasion: *Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy water-spouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me*^a. And the prophet Isaiah addresses the church in much the same language: *O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted*^a. But is immoderate grief to be indulged? Are we to abandon ourselves to sorrow, as if our case were desperate? No surely. *Be still* is the voice of God; and the mighty power accompanying that word hath in many instances subdued

^a Luke xii. 50.

^a Psalm xlii. 7.

^a Isaiah liv. 11.

the storm, when all other means have seemed ineffectual.

To be still conveys an idea of the lowest degree of patience and submission. Wherefore the condescension and goodness of God in addressing us after this manner is very admirable and affecting indeed. He does not say, "Glory in tribulation, magnify aloud the wisdom and justice of my proceedings;" (all which he might require of us, and we ought to aim at) but, "Be still, be silent, hold your peace:" thus kindly intimating the sense he has of our frailty and weakness, and his tender pity and compassion towards us amidst our sorrows. *As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. He knoweth our frame: he remembreth that we are dust^b. I will not, says he, contend for ever, neither will I be always wrath: for the spirit shall fail before me, and the souls which I have made^c. If therefore we cannot prevail on ourselves to sing of judgment, he will yet be pleased with our silence. To be still then seems chiefly to intend,*

1. A negative kind of submission; I mean the restraints we ought to lay upon our angry and tumultuous passions. This is the

^b Psalm ciii. 13, 14.

^c Isaiah lvii. 16.

first thing to be attempted, and which may be done when perhaps we can proceed no farther. The violent and sudden agitation of the mind under very pressing afflictions, hath hurried some persons into rash censures on the divine conduct, and an injurious treatment of themselves and others.

Curse God and die^a, said she who ought to have borne a part with Job in his affliction, and to have used her endeavours to reconcile him to the will of Providence. “Have nothing more to do with God. “He is not thy friend but thine enemy. “He does not deal kindly but cruelly by “thee. Throw off thine allegiance to him, “and renounce all thy former regards for “him.” To curse God in so many words, is indeed an outrage upon Deity of which the most profane are seldom guilty. But the secret thoughts of their hearts when they are in adversity, if they do indeed at all think of God, are very dishonourable to him; and they sometimes proceed so far as to express them with their lips. Nay, the good man himself, if he carefully watches his heart on these occasions, will find unbelief pride and passion ere he is aware kindling into a flame, and upon the point

^a Job ii. 9.

of bursting out in some hasty and impetuous word against God. To be still then, is to suppress all such murmuring thoughts and indecent reflections at their first rising, to keep a guard at every avenue of the soul, and to prevent if possible the least fall of a disobedient and undutiful spirit. And this perhaps is the utmost the Christian can do, especially at the first assault of some unexpected trouble, and when his mind is in a great ferment and confusion. What force is he obliged to put upon himself! And what distress does he endure, for fear a word should escape from his lips that may dishonour God, or give the enemy occasion to reproach religion! Aaron no doubt felt the workings of natural affection in a very great degree, when the judgments of God were executed in so tremendous a manner upon two of his sons, Nadab and Abihu; yet at the reasoning of Moses *he held his peace*°.

Undue resentments also against those who have been the more immediate causes of our affliction, and indeed an unsuitable carriage towards all around us, are to be carefully avoided. A man of a hasty temper is no sooner affronted or injured but he instantly catches fire. There is a general tu-

° Lev. x. 3.

mult within, and the effect appears in his countenance, his words, and his actions. But religion says, *Be still*. We can't indeed avoid feeling. Nor is it criminal to express our feelings, or in a proper manner to remonstrate against the abuses we receive. But the danger is, lest our passions get the better of our reason, and anger degenerate into malice. A watch therefore, a strict watch, must be kept over the furious and the malevolent affections of the soul. *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves*, says the apostle, *but rather give place unto wrath*^f. Such was the behaviour of David, on occasion of that very provoking affront he received from Shimei. He would not allow his servants to revenge it, though they had it in their power, and a fair opportunity offered^g. — Our tempers require also at such seasons very particular management, in regard of our connections in general. Affliction is mighty apt to affect mens natural dispositions, and to put them out of humour with all around them. To be still therefore is to avoid quarrelling with our friends, through a hasty misapprehension of their words and actions; or, if they do behave with shyness and coolness towards us, to

^f Rom. xiii. 19.^g 2 Sam. xvi. 10.

endeavour at least to bear it patiently : and, instead of carrying moroseness and severity with us into our worldly concerns, to demean ourselves with mildness and gentleness towards all men. In his haste the psalmist said, *Ali men are liars*^b : but he was quickly sensible that this was his infirmity.

So farther, to be still is to hold a restraint upon our passions that we offer no injury to ourselves, to our reason, our health, or our usefulness. The language of religion on these occasions is like that of the apostle to the Philippian jailor, *Do thyself no harm*ⁱ. Great liberties of this sort some have taken, abandoning themselves to grief, and absolutely refusing to be comforted. And it must be acknowledged that there is a strange disposition in the mind at such seasons to torment itself. It takes a kind of pleasure in gloomy thoughts, in an indolent and inactive state, and in an abstinence from the common enjoyments of life. All which has a tendency to consequences very sinful fatal and dangerous. — This restraint then upon the passions is what the text primarily and chiefly intends. We must not however stop here. —

^b Psalm cxvi. 11.

ⁱ Acts xvi. 28.

2. To be still is to preserve a calm and composed temper of mind under affliction.

This is carrying the matter farther. It is not merely refraining from impatience anger and resentment, but maintaining inward quietness serenity and constancy. I do not mean that stoical insensibility which some few may pride themselves in — a stupid unaffected undisciplined temper of mind. In such sense surely it can never be intended that we should be still. Afflictions would not be afflictions if they were not felt. It is well observed by a heathen writer, “ That
“ the more sensible perception a man has of
“ the evils he suffers, when yet he is con-
“ tented to suffer for the sake of virtue, so
“ much the more properly may he be said
“ to be courageous *.” And indeed it is difficult to say for what end our passions were given us, if they are to be totally suppressed. They have their use, and very important use too; which the apostle evidently supposes when he exhorts us *not to despise* divine corrections¹, that is, not to be insensible of them, or thoughtless and unconcerned about them. But the stillness I mean is that composure which our Saviour recommends when he says, *In patience pos-*

* Andron. Rhod. l. 2. c. 9.

¹ Heb. xii. 5.

sefs your souls^m. And it is happy indeed to have such a possession of ourselves, as to be capable of thinking coolly on the ways of Providence, and of conversing freely with our friends concerning them — to have such a composure as will admit of inward and serious reflection, will enable us to advert to the alleviating circumstances attending our afflictions, and will allow of our discharging the proper duties of life without hurry and distraction. This serenity of mind some Christians have carried with them through the severest trials, and that without any mixture of unnatural stupidity.

Who can read over the psalms of David, and hear him arguing on the dispensations of Providence, without admiring his calmness and constancy? The same may be said of Job. He did not lose his reason, his religion, or his hope and confidence in God, though he had lost almost all besides. But it is the character of our Lord Jesus Christ which affords the brightest illustration of this temper. The very night he was betrayed, he eat the passover with his disciples; and he conversed familiarly with them, while he had the king of terrors immediately before his eyes. O happy man

^m Luke xxi. 19.

who

who hath gained such a superiority as this over his tempestuous passions ! who, while he laments the loss of one enjoyment, can still taste a sweetness in those which remain ! who, amidst the relentings of frail nature, hath resolution enough to break through every difficulty, and betake himself to his duty ! who, though God seems as if he were about to slay him, can yet converse with God, can think and read and pray, and have a relish for these divine exercises ! — But there is,

3. A higher degree of patience and submission than even this required of us ; and that is, to justify approve and commend the divine proceedings.

A hard lesson this to learn ! “ What !
“ must I say it is all well, when the whole
“ stream of nature is against me ? Must I
“ acknowledge my condition to be the fittest
“ for me, when nought but blackness and
“ darkness encompass me on every side ?
“ Must I kiss the hand that almost crushes
“ me to nothing, and seems stretched forth
“ to destroy me ? ” Yes. So you ought to do. And so some good men have done. *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away,* says Job, *and blessed be the name of the Lord*”.

ⁿ Job i. 21.

Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him^p. “What-
 “ever be my condition I will speak honour-
 “ably of God. Faith tells me, notwith-
 “standing all I suffer, that he is wise just
 “and good; and my trembling lips shall
 “pronounce him so.” *I will praise the Lord, says David, as long as I have any be-
 ing*^q. “Though I am stript of all my en-
 “joyments and have nothing left but my
 “bare existence, no family, no friends, no
 “wealth, no worldly comforts or pleasures
 “whatsoever; yet God shall be magnified.
 “His name shall be exalted as long as I
 “have breath to speak his praise.” What
 a noble, what a divine and heavenly temper
 of mind is this! Such also was the lan-
 guage of the prophet Habakkuk, whilst he
 trembled in himself at the gloomy prospect
 of the calamities which he saw coming
 upon his native country. *Though the fig-
 tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be
 in the vines, the labor of the olive shall fail,
 and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock
 shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall
 be no herd in the stall: yet will I rejoice in*

^p Job ii. 10.^p Chap. xiii. 15.^q Psalm cxlvi. 2.

the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation^r.

Thus to glory in tribulation, may seem at first view too great a refinement in religion. Human nature is frail, and our spirits are so apt to sink under the weight of heavy afflictions, that it is hard to conceive how a man should *sing of judgment*, as scripture some where expresses it. But sure I am, upon the principles of the gospel it is reasonable, and with the aids of divine grace it is practicable. The instances I have mentioned, and many besides recorded in the New Testament, put the fact beyond dispute. Nay, there have been heathens whose firmness of mind in adversity, and whose sensibility too of the influence of divine Providence therein, are truly astonishing, and may well put some who call themselves Christians to the blush. It was the saying of a philosopher famous for his morality, and who was himself also a man of affliction, “I will plead for the ways of Providence towards men, for all of them^s.” And another represents it as the temper of his wise man “not only to sub-

^r Hab. iii. 17, 18.

^s Εγὼ ὑπὲρ πάντων τούτων πρὸς ἀνθρώπους ὑπολογήσομαι.
EPICTEtus.

“ mit to God, but to approve of his conduct: to acquiesce, not from mere necessity, but choice’.” Shall he then who enjoys the clear light of divine revelation, who hath drank into the spirit of the gospel, and is encouraged to seek and expect divine influences, hesitate one moment at that which the heathen pretends to purely on the principles of nature and reason? — But I forbear at present to enter into our obligations to this temper: my object hitherto has been only to describe the temper itself.

You see then what it is, in the language of the text, *to be still*. It is to lay a restraint upon our tumultuous passions — to be calm and composed — yea, if possible, to justify approve and commend the divine proceedings.

† Non pareo Deo, sed assentior: ex animo illum, non quia necesse est, sequor. SENECA Epist. 96.

DISCOURSE XIII.

PART II.

THE temper and behaviour required of us in a time of affliction have been explained — *Be still*. Whence we proceed,

II. To consider our obligations to the practice of these great and difficult duties.

Now these obligations, which are numerous and powerful, are all comprehended in this short but striking expression — I AM GOD. Language truly majestic, and at the same time most condescending and gracious — happily adapted to convey instruction conviction and comfort to the heart of a good man when in the deepest distress.

“ Know, as if he had said, that there is a

“ God — that he governs the world — that

“ I who have a right to govern it, who
“ am every way qualified to govern it, and
“ who have the tenderest affection for thee
“ in thy affliction, am that God — and that
“ all I do is in reference to some future de-
“ sign, wherein I will be exalted.” Let
us briefly contemplate each of these par-
ticulars.

FIRST. There is a God.

To set about proving so plain and ob-
vious a truth as this, and which none
among us deny, would be needless and im-
pertinent. That is not therefore what I
intend; but only to hold up this grand
fundamental principle of religion to the
view of the afflicted Christian. Amidst
a croud of sensible objects, we are mighty
apt to lose sight of him whose nature is
spiritual, and who is only to be apprehended
by the eye of faith. And there is no time
in which the imagination thoughts and pas-
sions are more powerfully assaulted by such
objects, than when we are in affliction.
Prosperity and adversity operate in this
respect alike. Sudden and extraordinary
troubles, by engrossing our attention, have
the same effect to shut out God from the
5 heart,

heart, as great and unexpected successes. To remind you therefore on these occasions that there is a God, is by no means unreasonable.

Be persuaded then to set God before you, Christian, in all his adorable perfections. Apprehend him present — immediately present with you, closely watching and accurately observing all your thoughts reasonings dispositions and affections. He not only *considers your trouble*, but, as the psalmist expresses it, *he knows your soul in adversities* " — with the utmost exactness and precision he eyes the various secret and complicated operations of your breast. The recollection therefore of this great and important truth, especially if it makes a deep impression on the heart, will have a prodigious effect to check and restrain your tumultuous passions. Was the blessed God to assume a visible form, and so reveal himself to your senses, I ask, Would not the lustre of his presence command an awe upon your spirits? And would not those striking words I AM GOD, pronounced immediately by his lips, oblige you at once to be still? How loud and clamorous forever the discourse between Job and his

^u Psalm xxxi. 7.

friends might be, when God steps in, when he makes one of the company, and darts the splendors of his infinite Majesty upon them, they are instantly struck dumb : and when the afflicted patriarch recovers from his surprize, with what humility meekness and submission does he address the great God ! *I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear : but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes* ^w. But, though you have no such sensible manifestation of the divine glory, God as really exists, and is as intimately acquainted with your temper and behaviour, as if that were truly the fact. Solomon cautions us not to speak a hasty word before the angel ^{*} : how much less should we be guilty of such presumption, did we apprehend ourselves, as we actually are, in the immediate presence of Almighty God himself !

SECONDLY. That God who is thus a witness of what passes in our breasts, is the great Governor of the world, and hath a concern in bringing about those events which occasion all this tumult of our passions. *I am God*, that is in other words,

^w Job xlii. 5, 6.

^{*} Eccles. v. 6.

“It is I who have done it.” *Shall there be evil in a city, says the prophet, and the Lord hath not done it* [†]?

The belief of a Providence that overrules all the motions of the material, and all the actions of the intellectual world, seems as reasonable as the belief of a God. What parent will desert his offspring? How then can it be supposed that he who implanted this principle in our nature (this *Στοργή*), should himself cast off all concern for the world, which is the offspring of his infinite wisdom power and goodness? Besides, it would not have been worth his while to have created the world, if when he had so done he had left it to govern itself; of which it is utterly incapable, and the consequence of which would have been the utmost confusion and misery. Nor is his self-sufficiency a bar against a Providence: for if this were a reason why he should not govern, it would be a reason why he should not create. And then, his omnipotence, his omnipresence, and all his other attributes, are strong arguments in favor of a Providence: for these render him infinitely capable of ruling the world; and

[†] Amos iii. 6.

if he were not to rule it, they could not be displayed in the manner they are to the view of his creatures. It follows therefore from the belief of a God, that there is a Providence, and with equal reason that this Providence must extend to the minutest affairs. Nothing is too inconsiderable for the notice and attention of the great God: nor does it appear how the whole could be directed to a particular end, without a regard to each part. And surely the concerns of man, since he is placed at the head of the world, must be the object of the special regard of Providence. The divine influence therefore in human affairs is capable of proof upon the principles of nature and reason. — And how very decisive the sentence of scripture is upon this matter I hardly need tell you. *Are not two sparrows, says our Saviour, sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. — The very hairs of your head are all numbered². Affliction then, which is every where represented as the means of promoting the Christian's real good, comes not forth of the dust, neither does trouble spring out of the ground³.*

² Matth. x. 29, 30.

³ Job v. 6.

“ Be still therefore, says the great Ruler
“ of the world, for I am God. ’Tis I that
“ do it. ’Tis I that deprive you of your
“ substance, your friends, your children,
“ your health, or your other enjoyments,
“ the loss of which you so bitterly lament.”

We are apt to look wholly at second causes, and to say, “ If this or that measure had
“ been taken, I had escaped this great evil:
“ or, If this or the other assistance had
“ been obtained, my child my brother or
“ my friend had not died.” So a torrent of trouble rises in the breast, rushes furiously through every avenue of the soul, and spreads confusion and desolation before it. But the reflection, That the hand of God is in it, would in a good degree controul, if not intirely subdue the impetuous current.

It is scarcely possible indeed that a thoughtful man should quite overlook the immediate causes of his affliction. Nay, a recollection of them, so far as it may be of use to detect the errors of his judgment or heart, and so to regulate his future temper and conduct, is fit and prudent. But otherwise, to what purpose is it incessantly to wander through the wild maze of causes and effects, when the event has taken place,
and

and cannot by all the reasoning in the world be superseded? This however is an evil to which we are exceedingly prone. And it is a very great evil, not only because it tends to heighten and aggravate our distress, but because it precludes those reflections on the influence of divine Providence, which would have a moral and religious, as well as a most salutary and healing, effect. Of what consequence is it therefore that we attentively eye the hand of God in our afflictions? This one consideration, that it is he hath done it, duly impressed on our hearts, would go a good way towards appeasing the angry passions of our breasts, and silencing the hasty and clamorous censures we are apt to throw out upon the instruments of our troubles. The mind, duly occupied with such thoughts and reflections, would be diverted from those objects which are apt to irritate and enflame. And then, the idea of God as the grand Agent would soften an ingenuous heart into submission; I mean such a heart as sincerely and affectionately loves that great and good Being. Nay, it would alleviate the affliction itself, and render it less pungent and agonizing. This was the ground of David's reasoning, when he preferred

ferred the pestilence to the sword. He considered the former judgment as proceeding more immediately from God; and it was less distressing to him to think of falling into his hands, than into the hands of men^b. So our Saviour composes himself to his approaching sufferings, by this very consideration of the divine influence in them. *The cup which my Father hath given me shall I not drink it?* — Affliction then comes not by chance, but by the permission appointment and influence of Providence; and therefore we ought to be still.

THIRDLY. The God who does it has an unquestionable right to do it. *Know that I am God* — It is the language of a Sovereign. So he speaks to the Israelites, *See now that I, even I am he, and there is no God with me; I kill, and I make alive: I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand*^d.

To dispute the dominion of God over his creatures, or to prescribe rules to him how he shall act, is a kind of arrogance and folly that wants a name for it. He is Lord of the universe, and has the clearest fullest

^b 1 Chron. xxi. 13. ^c John xviii. 11. ^d Deut. xxxii. 39.

and most indisputable property in every creature and thing that exists ; for they all owe their existence to his power and will. Who then shall say that he hath not a right to do what he pleases with his own ? especially when we reflect, as will hereafter be shewn, that he is most wise just and good ; and so cannot possibly err in any of his proceedings. It would be no injury done to an angel, were he to annihilate him ; because angels derive, not only their happiness and glory, but their Being from God. And surely, since all the pleasant ingredients poured into our cup are the fruit of his unmerited goodness, he may, without assigning any reason to us, diminish our comforts in what proportion he sees fit. Instead of prohibiting one tree in our earthly paradise, he may interdict them all. And indeed, considering the guilt we stand chargeable with, it is truly a wonder that this is not the case.

The right he has therefore to our substance, our friends, our families, our lives, our all, is a consideration that may well silence the discontented and murmuring passions of our afflicted breasts. Thus Job reasoned, when he found himself on a sudden reduced to poverty, and knew not how
to

to account for the measures Providence was pursuing. *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord^e.* And this he said falling down on the ground and worshipping; thus humbly and reverently acknowledging the universal dominion of God over his creatures. And it was doubtless, with a view to fix this idea upon him and his friends, that God afterwards revealed himself to them in his glory, and gave them so striking a description of his power and greatness. *As long as he had a Being* the psalmist resolved *to praise the Lord*; well remembering the force of this argument, that though he was stript of every thing to his very existence, God had done no other than he had an undoubted right to do, and there still remained cause for gratitude and praise^f. — But, while God thus proclaims himself a Sovereign, he would have us consider him,

FOURTHLY. As most just and wise in all his proceedings. “*Know that I am God*” — not such a God as are the heathen
“*deities* — not such a God as arbitrary
“*princes* would be, who often act from
“*mere caprice and humor, and without*

^e Job i. 21.

^f Psalm cxlvi. 2.

“ pro-

“ proposing to themselves any end worthy
“ of their supreme dignity. No. My wis-
“ dom is consummate: my justice is un-
“ impeached.”

Here let the man of affliction lay his hand upon his breast, and solemnly appeal to his conscience upon the question, Whether what he endures is not what he has deserved, yea far less than he might have justly apprehended? Dare you indulge a thought that God is severe, because he has abridged you of an enjoyment, which he himself gave you, which you have forfeited a thousand times, and which he has not taken away without leaving you still in the possession of some other comforts? He is not severe. Nor would he have been severe, even though he had deprived you of every thing that can be called good. The very shadow of injustice vanishes at the idea of God. The most distant suspicion of harshness or rigor in his proceedings, is absorbed and lost in the contemplation of our guilt. *If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, who could stand?* Does pride or resentment then rise in your breast? combat these daring opposers of the great God, with a steady re-

z Psalm cxxx. 3.

collection

collection of your ingratitude unfruitfulness and disobedience. Call to mind the affronts you have offered to the divine mercy and goodness: so will you tremble at the imagination of an unjust God. — Nor is he to be suspected of unfaithfulness. Has he told you that his Providence would always smile on your affairs? that health should ever bloom on your countenance? that peace and happiness should incessantly flourish in your dwelling? or, that your friends your relations or your children should never be snatched from your embraces? No. As he hath not failed of any one of his promises; so neither hath he given you the least ground to expect that, of which in the end he has deceived your expectations. *Let God be true, but every man a liar*^h.

And as thus a contemplation of the justice, so also of the wisdom of God, tends greatly to soothe and calm the tempestuous passions. God is most wise, that is, he orders all things so as to compass some truly good noble and important end. A truth this which stands as firm as his existence. Indeed the scheme of Providence is in our apprehension very mysterious, nor can it in the nature of things be otherwise; for it

^h Rom. iii. 4.

consists of so many different parts, and those so curiously framed and laid together, that it is an object by far too considerable to be clearly discerned by a naked eye, especially by an eye so weak and dim as is the human understanding in its present state. When therefore we apply our imperfect and often mistaken measures of reasoning to particular dispensations, it is no wonder we are greatly puzzled to give any tolerable account of them. The more exquisite the embroidery is, the more strange and confused will the wrong side of the work appear. But this difficulty of comprehending the ways of God, instead of inducing a thought the least unfavourable to the divine wisdom; should rather lead us to expect, that the administration of Providence, when it comes to be laid open to the view of angels and men, will appear the more grand and noble. — And now, since this is the case, how plain and natural the inference! That it is your duty, Christian, to acquiesce patiently in the will of God, though your affliction is very painful and distressing, and you are wholly at a loss to explain its immediate intendment. If he is most wise, it is certain that he hath some end in view worthy of himself; and it is as certain that he knows

knows how to promote your good by the most unlikely means. Surely he who framed this beautiful world out of a chaos of darkness and confusion, can easily make the greatest evils of life fruitful of the most desirable blessings. And that such will be the result of the present dispensation, will I hope clearly appear when you come to consider his goodness in connection with his wisdom, and the ground you have to conclude that you are interested in his favor. Be still then amidst the most threatening storms of adversity, remembering that he who is at the helm is infinitely wise and skilful, and that the winds and waves are under his controul. Which leads me to observe, that the most quieting consideration in a time of affliction is that which arises,

FIFTHLY. From the goodness of God, and the covenant-relation which subsists between him and us. "*Know that I am God*" — not a cruel but a merciful God; not "*your enemy but your friend.*"

To conceive of God as cruel is indeed to conceive of him as unjust, than which nothing is more base and unworthy. Such an

idea of the great Governor of the world ill-becomes even his bitterest enemies, and those who suffer his resentments in the highest degree. Yet, when he appears in the character of a Judge, and proceeds judicially against us, we may well be terrified, though we know he can do no wrong. A consciousness of guilt falling in with our natural notions of justice, must needs on such an occasion fill our breasts with consternation and horror. But, when on the contrary he assumes the character of a Friend or a Parent, and we view his mercy and goodness in close connection and in perfect harmony with his justice and truth, all cause of slavish fear and of undue emotion of mind at once ceases. A friend cannot wilfully injure me. A father cannot delight to destroy me. O! think then, Christian, how infinitely good the blessed God is — how he becomes your God — and what evidence you have that this relation does subsist between him and you.

God is good. — Transporting thought! enough to make the heart of the Christian leap within him, even when surrounded with the blackest scenes of adversity. His nature is good — infinitely good — good beyond description — beyond conception. The
softest

softest characters, the brightest images, the most tender and moving language he has himself adopted, to convey an idea, and after all it is but a faint and imperfect idea, of his goodness. He has the heart of a friend, the affection of a brother, the bowels of a parent. GOD IS LOVE. If to pardon the guilty, to extend mercy to rebels, to make the miserable happy, to pour a profusion of bliss on those who had merited vengeance; if these are instances of goodness, such instances are innumerable. Go where we will, as well into the gloomy habitations of the afflicted, as the chearful mansions of the prosperous and happy, we hear a voice proclaiming aloud, *The Lord is good; his mercy endureth for ever* *.

But the question returns: “ Though he
“ is thus good, and good to me and to
“ millions besides, in not punishing us im-
“ mediately according to our deserts; yet,
“ upon what principle may I consider him as
“ my friend, and as disposed to do me good
“ in the most essential instance, consistent-
“ ly with justice and truth, and with the
“ measures he seems to be pursuing?” Need
I tell you, Christian? The gospel, which
you have heard understood and believed,

* Ps. cxxxvi. 1.

gives a full and clear answer to this interesting question. He becomes your God through the mediation of Christ his son. Amazing love! *Him he spared not, but delivered him* unto death *for your sake*, that *with him* he might *freely give you all things* *. By his obedience and sufferings, justice is appeased, and all obstructions which lay in the way of your reconciliation to God, are removed. With him a covenant is publicly solemnly and most surely ratified, wherein provision is made for your present and your everlasting happiness. Your afflictions are by these means converted into blessings, and rendered salutary and useful. Nay, more than this, the Son of God, by his deep and unparalleled sufferings, is become a sharer with you in your sorrows, is experimentally *touched with the feeling of your infirmities*, and is himself immediately interested in the happy issue of all those fiery trials with which you are exercised †. What can I say more to magnify the goodness of God? You have here the strongest expression of it. You see it united with truth and justice; and thus pouring the richest blessings upon the most unworthy. And now, amidst these wonders of divine love, methinks you have lost

* Rom. viii. 32. † Heb. ii. 14, — 18.; ch. iv. 15.

fight of your afflictions; or at least begin to see that they may very well consist with the tender mercies of an infinitely good God.

“ But ah! you question whether he is your “ God.” Why should you question it, Christian? If you prefer his favor above every other enjoyment, if you look for reconciliation with him in the way he has appointed, and if your grand object is a conformity to his image; be assured he is your God. There can be no objection on his part, as clearly appears from the harmony of the divine attributes in our redemption; wherefore a deliberate and hearty consent on your’s, may well put the matter beyond all reasonable dispute. Nor should you infer from your afflictions, that he is not your God; for afflictions may be, and often are, the fruits of his parental tenderness and love. To the doubts, however, which arise from this quarter, oppose the chearful remembrance of the various blessings you have received at his indulgent hands. Call to mind the many striking expressions of his providential bounty and goodness, and especially the seasonable interpositions of his grace in your favor, to restore your wandering feet from the paths of sin, and to unite your heart and affections to himself. Would he have shewn you

your misery? Would he have directed you to a Saviour? Would he have inclined you to devote yourself to his fear and service? if he had designed to destroy you. — Since then God is infinitely good, and you have ground to hope, that he is your God, ought you not to suppress every murmuring thought, and cheerfully acquiesce in his will? — But there is one idea farther included in the text; and that is,

SIXTHLY, and *lastly*, That all God does is in reference to some future design. This hath been already observed in general, whilst we have been speaking of the wisdom of God. But it deserves our more particular attention, and the rather, as this sentiment is strongly expressed in the last clause of the verse — *I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.*

To lay open the designs of Providence, in all its various dispensations, would be a vain attempt. We are not equal to the task. Yet, of this we may be assured, that whatever afflictions good men endure, the object the blessed God proposes is their advantage, and in compassing that end the display of his own glory. Now, their afflictions

afflictions are sometimes made to subserve the purposes of their temporal good. Events, which at their first appearance have threatened the most unfavourable consequences, have yet operated in a manner directly contrary to our views, and after a while have brought about those very ends they seemed adapted to defeat. For examples of this sort, I might refer you to the histories of Joseph David and others on divine record. Nay, there are few serious persons but must have made many such observations in the course of their experience. And in these instances, how wonderfully have the wisdom power and goodness of God been illustrated and displayed! Wicked men have been obliged to acknowledge the sovereign dominion of Providence, whilst the hearts of good men have been overwhelmed with gratitude and joy. So is God *exalted among the heathen*,—so is he *exalted in the earth*. But however afflictions may operate under the conduct of Providence, in regard of our outward circumstances, there are ends proposed by them, in a moral and religious view, which, as they are more plain and obvious, so they are far more interesting and important. And here how bright, how chearful, how animating

a scene have I to present to his view who sincerely loves God, be his affliction in itself ever so pungent and affecting! Faith is a most excellent important and necessary grace. It lies at the foundation of religion. It is the root from whence all the pleasant fruits of acceptable obedience proceed and grow. *Without faith it is impossible to please God*¹. And by faith the just live walk and act^k. Now, affliction is a means of trying the genuineness of our faith, and of improving and strengthening this divine grace. So the apostle Peter tells the afflicted Christians of his time: *Ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations; that the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ*^l. Many a good man hath for a long while questioned the reality of his faith; that is, whether he hath truly believed to the purposes of his salvation. But some grievous affliction, by putting his faith to the trial, hath in a good measure removed his doubts on that matter. The great objects of religion, amidst all these sad scenes, have struck his mind in so

¹ Heb. xi. 6.^k Heb. x. 38.^l 1 Pet. i. 6. 7.

powerful

powerful a manner, and his heart and affections have been so sensibly knit and united to God, that he has happily learned, with little or no hesitation, to say in the language of the apostle, *I know whom I have believed*^m. Well! and should not so valuable an acquisition as this, the ascertaining and increasing your faith, reconcile you, Christian, to your afflictions; or at least prevent your forming a too hasty judgment of them, as if they could not be salutary in their intendment? — Again, the purifying our hearts, the subduing our pride, and the crucifying our affections to the world, are other ends proposed by afflictive providences. And who is there, of any discernment and seriousness, but will acknowledge that these are objects the most important and desirable? Our corruptions are the sources of all the miseries we endure. The Christian knows it. He feels it. He laments it. Above all things, therefore, he most ardently wishes, not only to have their influence restrained, but their dominion subdued. From the miserable captivity in which he was once held to his lusts, he is indeed now, by the grace of God, delivered. But his evil passions still live,

2 Tim. i. 12,

still

still disturb his peace, and interrupt his joys. If afflictions therefore, though painful to be endured, are the means which God has appointed still farther to weaken and overcome them; it ought, it will be an argument to conciliate the Christian to such measures. *Should we not be in subjection to the Father of Spirits, when he graciously condescends to chasten us for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness*^a? To resemble God is the perfection of our nature. Set that man, Christian, before your eyes whose honor whose happiness this is, who excels in meekness humility temperance fortitude charity contempt of the world, and every other divine and heavenly grace: and then say, Whether it is not worth your while to undergo the discipline of temporal disappointments and troubles, if you may by these means get at the rank he holds, and enjoy the refined pleasures he possesses? But it is farther to be remembered,

That there are purposes to be answered by these dispensations in the world to come; the contemplation of which, though we have at present but a very general and imperfect idea of them, may contribute great-

^a Heb. xii. 9. 10.

ly to the pacifying our minds under the frowns of Providence. Our Saviour's words to Peter on another occasion may be applied to the matter before us: *What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter*^o. The sufferings of the present life have a reference to, and a connection with, the joys of another: *They work for you, Christian, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*^p. If therefore when you arrive at that world, it shall clearly appear, that every tear which fell from your eyes, every sigh which arose from your breast, and every sad complaint which dropped from your lips, was over-ruled for your real good, and became a means of heightening your bliss and glory in that state; if this, I say, shall then clearly appear, as it most certainly will, you will not regret, but with infinite gratitude applaud the various measures which Providence hath taken with you. Think of this — believe it — expect it; and you will *be still*.

^o John xiii. 7.^p 2 Cor. iv. 17. 18.

DISCOURSE XIII.

P A R T III.

WE have discoursed at large of the several truths included in this short, but comprehensive sentence, I AM GOD; and have shewn how admirably they are adapted to relieve and comfort the real Christian under his afflictions. And it remains that we now,

III. Consider the regards we are required to pay to these interesting truths. *Know* that I am God.

There is no doubt but God hath access to the heart, and that he can, and sometimes does by the exertion of a special and effectual influence, calm the ruffled mind amidst a tempest of worldly troubles. It is enough for him to speak the word, *Be still,*
and

and the tumultuous passions of the breast, as well as the raging waves of the sea, must, they will submit. To this purpose the prophet describes him as saying, *I create the fruit of the lips; peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, I will heal him*^a. And, *when he giveth quietness, who can make trouble**? It is however to be remembered, that God deals with men as reasonable creatures. When he communicates comforts to the afflicted, he does it by impressing upon their hearts a clear and lively conviction of those great truths I have been explaining. So that they who enjoy this divine peace and composure can give a reason of the hope that is in them. There is therefore a duty incumbent upon us, in regard of our treatment of these truths. And what is that duty? Why surely — to well weigh and consider them — to believe them, and so to enter into the spirit of them — to endeavour to apply them to ourselves — and to pray earnestly to God to make them effectual for appeasing and quieting our distressed minds. All which is comprehended in the seasonable and authoritative admonition, *Know that I am God.*

^a Isa. lvii. 18, 19. * Job xxxiv. 29.

FIRST, It is our duty to well weigh and consider these important truths.

They can have no effect, unless they are perceived and understood. This, therefore, should be our first object. "But, ah! say you, how can I fix my attention to these matters at a time when I am surrounded with gloomy objects, and the powers of thought and reflection are enfeebled disturbed and broken?" True. The difficulty is very great, and all proper allowance should be made for the sharpness of your affliction, the tenderness of your constitution, and the disorder of your animal spirits. Yet, if reason is not wholly interdicted or suspended, you have surely some command of yourself: you are not totally lost overwhelmed and undone. Let me remind you then of certain prudential expedients within your reach, which, if you were to make trial of them, would go a good way towards composing your mind to consideration.

Some kinds of trouble involve persons in continual intercourses with the world, and allow them little or no time for reflection or meditation. Such is the unhappiness of those who are overwhelmed with the perplexities

plexities of trade and business, and of those whose poverty obliges them to work hard and late. The objects of sense are every moment pressing upon their sight, and what with contriving how to extricate themselves out of their difficulties, and endeavouring to carry their schemes to that end into execution, their nature is almost worn out, and their spirits and strength very much exhausted. Now, I am sensible, it must be extremely difficult for such persons to apply their minds to close and fixed consideration. Yet it may be done. It hath been done. Make the experiment, therefore, Christian. Withdraw from the public view. Spend some time alone. Endeavour to shut the world out of your thoughts, and to impose silence on your passions. The advantage which will certainly accrue from such a recess to your bodily health, as well as to the state of your soul, should engage you at least to attempt it. Don't object, that you have not time. This business properly managed will fit you for your other business. And the pains you are at to recollect yourself on matters of the highest moment, will enable you the better to endure your worldly disappointments. The very changing the scene would be of considerable service, if

there were no other advantage to be expected. Our Lord, amidst the hurries of his public ministry, frequently retired for meditation and prayer; and he did so the very night he was betrayed, and when all the circumstances of his approaching sufferings were immediately before his eyes.

But there are other afflictions, such as particularly the sudden loss of relations or friends, which have quite a different effect, especially upon persons of strong feelings and a tender constitution. When the first paroxysm of their grief is over, we shall see them sink into a languid melancholy inactive state. And having the gloomy objects of their sorrow continually before them, we shall find them as indisposed, even in their solitude, to attend to the great truths of religion, as those who are perplexed and hurried with the business of the world. What then is to be done here? It is your duty, Sirs, to rouse yourselves, to put a force upon nature, and to use all the means Providence affords in order to recruit your animal spirits, and to restore you to a capacity for calm reasoning and reflection. Set about the business of your stations. Endeavour to divert your thoughts from their usual channel. Allow your friends to converse

converse with you. And remember, that that melancholy pleasure you are prone to indulge is insnaring and sinful.

But after all, there are few afflictions, however acute and pungent, that will not allow a man some intervals of composure, in which he may apply himself to the duty I am recommending. Such opportunities therefore you should eagerly seize and diligently improve. Be all attention, when you are in this temper, to the reasonings and counsels of your Christian friends; or else withdraw from the world, retire within yourselves, read the bible, fix your minds to the interesting truths of religion, compare them with each other, and apply them to your own case. *In adversity consider* *.

This then is the first step towards attaining that submission fortitude and chearfulness under affliction which the text teaches. But the considering divine truths is not sufficient. We must,

SECONDLY, Believe them.

What they are we have already seen. Know *that I am God*. — There is a God. He governs the world. He does all things wisely justly and well. He in-

* Eccles. vii. 14.

tends our good by every afflictive providence, and hath made effectual provision through the mediation of Christ to that end. Now these truths are so clear and obvious, that in common they are no sooner perceived than they are assented to. But it is not a general idea of them, or the barely admitting them to be true, that will relieve and comfort the Christian under extraordinary trials. No. His attention must be steadily fixed to them. He must fully and firmly credit them. His judgment and conscience must be deeply impressed with their divine authority. But ah! this is no easy matter. Though he may have long since laid them down with himself as unquestionable truths, and though he may even now be so far composed, as to be able to revolve them in his mind; yet his faith hath difficulties to struggle with, which before this were perhaps scarcely imagined.

There is a strange propensity in mankind to infidelity; and a degree of it there is in good men themselves. Whence the apostle exhorts us *to take heed of an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God*. Now, in a time of affliction, unbelief collects strength from various quarters, and often becomes so formidable as to require the ut-

Heb. iii. 12.

most

most exertion of all the powers of divine faith and of enlightened reason. Firm as the Christian's confidence is in the existence of God, in his wisdom faithfulness and love, in the mediation of Christ, and in his watchful care of every one of his people; how quickly is that confidence shaken, when assaulted by strange dark and mysterious events of Providence! "Had things
"fallen out in this or that way, as he
"wished and expected, he could easily per-
"ceive how God would have been glorified,
"his own interests promoted, and many
"other valuable ends answered. But, what
"shall he think now the reverse is the case?
"— the plainest maxims of reason and pru-
dence over-ruled and borne down by an
obstinate kind of fatality, nature and Pro-
vidence in opposition to each other, and
the promises of God's word, to his appre-
hension, flatly contradicted by the most sad
and gloomy events." Such appearances,
such objections, such reasonings, put him
for a while to the stand. Nor does Satan
fail by his suggestions to afford all the aid
he can to the interests of unbelief. Where-
fore, amidst this fierce conflict between faith
and sense, the Christian finds it no easy
matter, like Abraham, to hope against
hope, and to believe that God may still be

from

Q 3

for

for him, though all things seem to be against him. What shall he then in these circumstances do? Let me tell you, Christian, your duty —

Endeavour to the utmost of your power to divest yourself of prejudice and passion, and to reflect how apt we are to be deceived and misled by appearances, especially when oppressed and bowed down with affliction. Call up to your view the first great principles of religion, which are clear and self-evident, and labour to fix them upon your heart and conscience. Set those other truths which are deducible from them in their fullest and strongest light, and give the several pleas in favor of them a fair impartial and dispassionate hearing. Recollect the impressions they formerly made on your mind, when they struck you with all their native evidence and conviction. Oppose past facts and experiences to your present apprehensions and feelings. Consider well the testimony of others, who have been as deeply afflicted as yourself. And above all, cherish in your breast a sacred reverence for the divine authority of scripture, resolving to admit whatever that teaches, as the clear plain and unalterable will of God. — And now, while you thus suffer truth to speak for

for itself, and listen patiently to what your bible, your friends, and your own experience have to say in favor of it; the clamors of sense and passion will be apt to subside, and your faith to triumph over all the efforts of unbelief. So will you believe, and rejoice in believing. And so will your affliction, while you thus look to the things which are not seen and eternal, become light and momentary. But then this supposes what I have farther to recommend; and that is,

THIRDLY. The applying these great truths to ourselves, and to our own immediate circumstances.

The assenting to them as true will avail little to our comfort, if we have all the while a strong presumption against us, that we are at variance with God. A reflection on the wisdom power and justice of that great Being, will in this case serve rather to heighten and aggravate our grief, than subdue and soften it. Nay, an idea of his goodness, however pleasing in itself, will afford us but very partial and insufficient relief. For how natural the reasoning!—
“He may be good, and yet I who have
“been his enemy miserable.”

Here I cannot help observing of what vast importance it is that this great question is decided, or however that a man is in fact a real Christian, ere it falls to his lot to enter the gloomy vale of adversity. Afflictions indeed often prove the salutary means, with a divine blessing, of bringing persons to a sense of religion: yet they must even in that case be extremely painful in their operation; for what more tremendous than the idea of a God assuming the appearance of an avenging judge? And if on the other hand a man is totally insensible to any of these feelings, it must still be very unhappy for him to have no resources of comfort under the frowns of Providence, but such as nature or art supply, and which are quickly exhausted. How infinitely desirable then is true religion! O who would not wish to meet the enemy, if he must enter the lists with adversity, in the character of a Christian armed with divine faith, rather than in the wretchedly defenceless and desperate state of a man of the world? This latter case is sad beyond description. But to return — I am now addressing myself to those who truly fear God. And since, at these times, it is no uncommon thing for even a good man to question his interest in the divine favor,

favor, or however to be at a loss how to apply those considerations I have been recommending to his own case; it is my object here to afford him the best assistance I am able in each of these particulars. And, I. As to your doubts, Christian, upon the matter of your own personal interest in the favor of God; if these can any way be cleared up, composure and chearfulness will quickly follow. Now it is hardly to be expected that I should combat all your false reasonings and groundless jealousies. That would carry me too far. What I mean is only to throw out a few hints for the guiding your inquiries upon this grand question. And here, besides the general advice of examining well the state of your soul, of comparing it with the word of God, and of calling to mind your past religious experiences; let me earnestly press you to a diligent observation of your prevailing temper under the present dispensation. That rightly understood will throw a light upon your real character. But before you proceed, lay it down with you as an unquestionable truth, that no inference is to be drawn from your affliction to the prejudice of your filial relation to God. Do not say, "If God loved me, he would not deal with me after this manner."

"manner." For it is evident, not only from the clearest principles of reason but from undoubted facts, that the severest afflictions may be and often are designed for the good of those who suffer them. Nay scripture assures us, that *whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth; and that if we were without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, we should be bastards and not sons*.*

And now ask yourself, what is the temper of your heart towards God under the present exercise? Is it your first grand concern to be assured, that God is not contending with you as an enemy but as a friend? Do you dread the thought of charging him unjustly, be the event of your affliction what it may? Are you willing to admit that you have deserved all you suffer at his hands, and a great deal more? Would you fain come at the cause of his displeasure, being more solicitous to have your sin forgiven and your heart made better, than even your affliction itself removed? Like Ephraim, are you *ashamed and confounded, because you bear the reproach of your pride and folly**? Has your sorrow the same effect on you it had on the Corinthians? Does it

* Heb. xii. 6, 8.

* Jer. xxxi. 19.

*work in you carefulness, clearing yourself, indignation, fear, vehement desire, zeal, revenge**? In a word, are your afflictions the means, not of making the breach between God and you wider, but of softening your heart, and bringing you nearer to God? — If you can reply to these questions, and others of the like nature, in the affirmative, or if these are the main objects of your concern and attention; you may safely conclude that God is your friend, and that he intends you no real harm by any of his dispensations. And surely some satisfaction on this important point, though it arise not to an assurance of hope, will tend greatly to compose your spirits, and to reconcile you to the will of God. — But there is something farther to be attempted, and that is,

2. The application of those general truths I have been recommending, to your own particular case. It is the unhappiness of many good men to fail here. Though they are not without hope in God, yet they are so enfeebled with affliction, that they know not how to reason with themselves in the same manner, and with that expertness and vivacity, they have perhaps often reasoned with others in the like circumstances. Now, if you could have resolution enough to make

* 2 Cor. vii. 11.

an effort in this way, the effect would be considerable. Not content therefore with a general persuasion that God is wise just faithful and good, see whether you cannot trace out these characters in the present visitation of his Providence. A little pains will possess you of not a few expressions of gentleness and mercy amidst the most fiery trial: and the remembrance of them will wonderfully assist and enliven your broken spirits. This done, proceed a little farther, and consider with yourself what possibly may be the result of your affliction — that God can and often does bring events to an issue little expected, and by means as improbable — that his wisdom is more than equal to all the difficulties and perplexities you can imagine — and that as he does not willingly grieve the children of men, but ever delights in mercy, so he will very probably magnify his goodness in your deliverance. Or, however this providence may terminate in regard of your temporal interests, consider what infinite benefit may, and most certainly will, accrue thence to your nobler part. Here the most pleasing, I may add transporting, prospects will rise to your view, especially when you allow your thoughts to wander beyond the line of time, which is not afar off, into the

the blissful regions of eternity. And, in a word, if amidst these reflections and reasonings you are suddenly startled by the painful feelings of nature, or by contradicting and opposing events; consider the great God as immediately present, submissively bow the knee of faith at the foot of his throne, and obstinately resolve to place an implicit confidence in him, be the scene before you ever so dark and inexplicable. — It now remains that I add to the advice already given,

FOURTHLY, That of fervent prayer.

Our obligations in general to this duty are founded in the doctrine of divine influences — A doctrine perfectly consonant with right reason, and which makes up a considerable part of scripture-revelation. Those to whom I am now addressing myself are fully persuaded of it: I shall not therefore stay here to explain or defend it. Nor need I take pains to convince the afflicted Christian, that divine assistances are peculiarly requisite in a time of extraordinary trial and difficulty. Your own sad experience of the frailty of human nature, the corruption and perverseness of your heart, and the inconstancy and turbulency

of

of your passions, puts the question with you beyond all dispute. Convinced then of the need you stand in of a superior influence to impress the truths recommended on your heart, and so to render them effectual for appeasing and quieting you under your troubles; and satisfied from the word of God that you have sufficient grounds to hope for that influence; it is most certainly your incumbent duty to pray for it.

While therefore you are assured, that *God is a very present help to them that fear him in time of trouble*¹; that *his grace is sufficient for them*²; that *as their days their strength shall be*³; that *he will give them his Holy Spirit*⁴; and *will never leave them nor forsake them*⁵; be persuaded to pour out your heart to him in fervent prayer, keeping in view your own wants, and these his gracious and seasonable promises to the afflicted. *Ask, says our Saviour, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. If ye being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him*⁶? And since we have an high priest who

¹ Ps. xlv. 1. ² 2 Cor. xii. 9. ³ Deut. xxxiii. 25.
⁴ Luke xi. 13. ⁵ Heb. xiii. 5. ⁶ Luke xi. 9, 11.

is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, let us, says the apostle, come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need^b. How mightily enlivening soothing and encouraging are such assurances as these, from the lips of an infinitely faithful and compassionate God! Revolve them in your mind. Believe them. Plead them with God. And look for the fulfilment of them.

There is a kind of omnipotence in the prayer of faith. *It availeth much, says the apostle James^c. It hath stayed the course of the sun. It hath stopp'd the bottles of heaven. It hath healed the sick. It hath raised the dead. And though we are not now warranted to expect any such preternatural interventions of Providence in our favor; yet the efficacy of prayer, through the mediation of Christ, to draw down even temporal blessings, will upon good grounds gain credit with those who believe their bible, and are carefully attentive to some facts which have fallen within their own immediate observation. But waving this, it will be sufficient to our present purpose, to remark the great utility of prayer to calm the mind and soothe the passions, wrought into*

^b Heb. iv. 15, 16.

^c Jam. v. 16. *πολύ ιχθύων*

a tempest by disappointment and sorrow. Would you be still? Would you be quiet patient and submissive to the will of Heaven? — Pray. Retire from the world. Lay open your whole soul to God in secret. And thus giving vent to that flood of grief, which hath perhaps for some time been pent up in your breast, you will quickly obtain relief. The expedient has been tried by many, and been often found effectual. How sweet and chearful a serenity of mind did Jacob experience, after he had wrestled with the angel, and had *wept and made supplication to him*^d! The psalmist, having declared the benefit he reaped from an intercourse with Heaven in this duty, tells us that the godly should hence take encouragement to pray, and adds, *surely in the flood of great waters* (perhaps he means this tempest of the passions I have been describing) *they shall not come nigh unto him*^e. And however there was no sinful mixture of passion in that extraordinary agitation our Saviour felt in the garden, yet it was by retiring from his disciples and pouring out *strong cries and tears* unto his Father, that he composed himself to his sufferings^f. O

^d Gen. xxxii. 24 — 30. & Hof. xii. 4. ^e Ps. xxxii. 5, 6.
^f Heb. v. 7, 8.

then

then be persuaded, Christian, to copy after his example.

Thus have I at large shewn you the regards we are required to pay to the interesting truths contained in this short but comprehensive sentence, I AM GOD. We are to *know* — to well weigh and consider them — to believe them, and so enter into the spirit of them — to endeavour to apply them to ourselves — and to pray earnestly to God to make them effectual for quieting our distressed minds.

And now, let me close what has been said with an address to all those who are under the frowns of Providence, and of whom these duties I have been describing are more immediately required. And,

I. As to such who make light of their afflictions, or, to use the words of scripture, *despise the chastening of the Lord*². Allow me, Sirs, to expostulate with you on your great folly and sin. That insensibility which you account your happiness, is not the stillness and composure which the text recommends. Nor is that daring resolution of which you may perhaps boast, of the same nature with the courage of a real Christian — a courage which is the effect of a

² Heb. xii. 5.

becoming submission to the will of God, and a firm confidence in his power and goodness. It is indeed wrong to dwell incessantly on our afflictions, and to give an unreasonable indulgence to a wild and gloomy imagination. But will you say it is rational or manly, to be indifferent about events that are interesting and important — to stifle your sorrows by thoughtlessness and inconsideration — or to drown them in vain and unlawful pleasures? From these sources you may indeed derive some little present relief: but that relief you are purchasing at a very dear rate. Such a foolish dissipation of the mind renders you incapable of taking the fit and prudent measures to extricate you out of your troubles. And it will in the end be followed with a sadness, which will greatly increase and aggravate your distress.

But the consideration chiefly to be regarded is the affront you hereby offer to God. It is his hand that is upon you. And think you that he will not resent such a contemptuous treatment of his providence? Who ever contended with him and prospered? Of Ahaz it is said, that in the time of his distress he trespassed yet more against the Lord: and a particular mark is

set upon him — *This is that king Abaz^h.* God afflicts either in judgment or mercy: and there cannot be a more sad symptom of his judicial displeasure, than the not feeling our afflictions, or the being totally inattentive to the instruction and reproof they are designed to convey. Those are alarming words — *Ephraim is joined to idols: let him aloneⁱ.* *They would none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof: therefore shall they eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices^k.* — In adversity therefore consider. Know the rod and who hath appointed it. Eye attentively the hand of God. Inquire wherefore it is he contends with you. Be humbled at his feet. Implore the forgiveness of what is amiss. And rest not satisfied without feeling the salutary effect of your affliction, to imbitter sin to you, to wean your hearts from the world, and to raise your affections to heaven.

2. As to those who are apt to faint under the rebukes of Providence — a temper to which Christians are usually more prone than to that just described. With you, my friends, I most tenderly sympathize. The heart knows its own bitterness; and all proper allowance is to be made for the hasty

^h 2 Chron. xxviii. 22. ⁱ Hos. iv. 17. ^k Prov. i. 30, 31.

and unguarded fallies of pungent grief. To bid you not feel your affliction would be to heighten and aggravate your distress. And to blame you for pouring out your complaints to those around you, would be cruel and inhuman. Nature will have its course. The tide is not to be instantly turned. Yet your passions, though they are not to be immediately subdued, may be guided into their proper channel, and be assisted to some useful and important purposes. And who knows but the tempest may by and by subside, and a calm ensue?

To these ends let me remind you again of what I have already particularly discoursed — There is a God — That God governs the world — He has a right to govern it — He is most wise just and good — The measures he pursues are all directed to some valuable and important object — He does not willingly afflict the children of men — You are not to conclude from your present feelings that he is your enemy — Others have been deeply afflicted as well as you — Jesus the Captain of your salvation was made perfect through sufferings — He knows how to pity you — And *his* sorrows have sufficient efficacy in them to convert *yours* into real blessings. Spend a thought on these things, *O ye that*
are

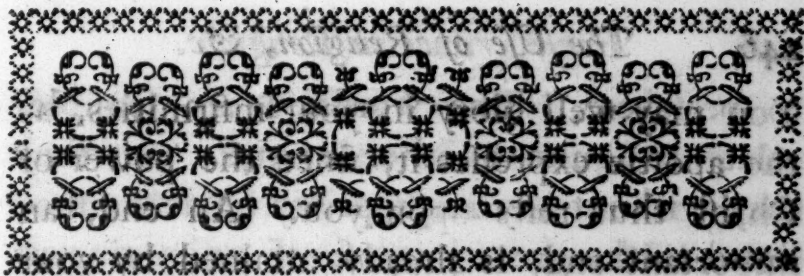
*are afflicted, tossed with tempests, and hitherto not comforted**. They are considerations which will however hold you up from despair, and prevent your uttering rash censures on the ways of God. — “ But, ah !
“ your minds are in such confusion, and
“ you are so perplexed with doubts as to
“ your interest in the divine favor, that you
“ can take little comfort from these considerations.” It may be so. Let me however intreat you to turn your attention for a while, if that is possible, from your affliction ; to think with yourselves how much worse your condition might be, it would have been, if God had treated you according to your deserts ; to consider the mercies you still enjoy ; to reflect on your past experience of the divine goodness ; to make your bible your companion in these sad hours of grief and melancholy ; to give your Christian friends a patient hearing while they attempt to comfort you ; and above all, to take sanctuary at the throne of grace, and there pour out your tears of sorrow to him who hath an ear to hear, and a heart to pity, the afflicted.

3. As to those who are enabled to practice the great duties I have been describing ; How great, my friends, is your mercy !

* Isa. liv. 11.

You may well glory in your infirmities, as the apostle expresses it, since the power of Christ thus rests upon you. An end, an important end, is already attained by your having been afflicted. O! let patience have its perfect work. Look to yourselves that ye lose not those things which ye have wrought, but that ye receive your reward. Still confide in the power goodness and faithfulness of God. Still rely on the mediation advocacy and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. And still expect those aids and supports from the Blessed Spirit which you may yet need. And comfort yourselves with this animating consideration, that *the trial of your faith, which is much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, will be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ¹.*

¹ 1 Pet. i. 7.



DISCOURSE XIV.

Perseverance in Religion the Christian's Duty.

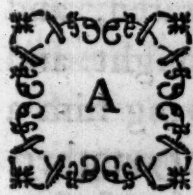


PART I.



JUDGES viii. 4.

— *Faint, yet pursuing* —.



FIT motto this for the arms the Christian soldier bears—descriptive at once of the fatigue he endures in the course of his warfare, and of his resolution notwithstanding

to persevere. The words, I am sensible, relate to quite another matter; yet they may without any impropriety be accommodated to the great purpose of animating us to the duties of our Christian profession, which is the object of the present discourse. But, before I proceed to this improvement of them, it will be proper to give you a general view of the story to which they refer.

The Israelites, having sinned against God, were delivered into the hand of the Midianites, who grievously oppressed them for seven years. In these circumstances, feeling the sad effects of their folly and disobedience, they called upon God. God in his great mercy heard them, and having first sent a prophet to exhortate with them upon their ungrateful and rebellious conduct, raised them up a saviour. This saviour was Gideon, a person of little note, being of a family, as he himself says, poor in Manasseh, and the least in his father's house. To him the Lord appeared, and commanded him to go in his might and save Israel; at the same time giving him a sign, and afterwards at his request another, to confirm his faith in the promise of success. Gideon endued with the spirit of
God,

God, sets himself to the work he had undertaken. The altar of Baal he boldly attacks, destroys it, and cuts down the grove that was by it. At this the Midianites were highly incensed, as apprehending a general revolt to be intended. Wherefore they, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, gathered themselves together, in prodigious numbers, to subdue this rebellion of the Israelites. Upon which Gideon blew the trumpet, and assembled about thirty-two thousand men to battle. But by the command of God this army, though inconsiderable when compared with the Midianitish host, was reduced to three hundred: for the honor of the victory God was resolved to secure to himself. Before however any thing is attempted, Gideon receives direction to repair in disguise to the camp of the enemy; for he should there meet with a circumstance, which should fully satisfy him of the success of the enterprise he was presently going upon. To the camp he accordingly goes, and mingling himself with the soldiers he hears one of them relate a dream, which another immediately interprets of the victory which the sword of Gideon was quickly to gain over them. Assured therefore of success he immediately returns,

returns, and prepares for the engagement. His three hundred men he divides into three companies, and puts a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers. So he marches in the midst of the night to the outside of the camp; when on a sudden, at the word of command, his men break their pitchers, blow their trumpets, and cry, *The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon!* This strikes such a terror into the Midianitish host, that imagining themselves betrayed, every man's sword is turned against his fellow; the consequence of which is a general slaughter throughout the camp. No less than an hundred and twenty thousand are slain; and fifteen thousand only make their escape. These, with their princes at their head, make the best of their way towards the country beyond Jordan; which Gideon perceiving gives orders to the Ephraimites to take the waters, that is, to pass the fords before them. So he and his three hundred men follow: and at Jordan, as the text tells us, they passed over *faint yet pursuing* —

That they were *faint* was not to be wondered at. They had endured great fatigue the past day and night. So speedy was the pursuit, that they had little or no time to take
proper

proper refreshment. And it is probable they had their fears, lest, notwithstanding all the success they had met with, the remaining few with their princes should escape, should rally again, and supported with fresh succours should return, and recover all the advantages they had lost. They were faint — *Yet they pursued.* Though their strength began to fail them, and so their spirits to flag; yet they resolved they would not give out. It was not enough that a hundred and twenty thousand were slain: the whole host must be destroyed. The consequence of a few only escaping, especially as their chiefs were among them, might be fatal. To stop here therefore at Jordan, and consider their work as done, would be very impolitic. So they would in all likelihood lose the advantages they had gained, and perhaps bring themselves into a more wretched state of servitude than they were in before. So they would betray a want of confidence in God, and disgrace themselves, their General, and the cause in which they were embarked. Whereas on the contrary if they pursued, the issue, they had reason to believe, would be glorious. God had strengthened them hitherto, and why might not they hope he would still strengthen

strengthen them? What had happened shewed the mighty power of God, and why should they distrust that power? Fewer remained to be subdued than had already been conquered. Gideon, that man of God, was at their head, and he was spiring them to the pursuit. It would be greatly to their honor to reduce the kings of Midian, and for ever henceforth to put it out of the power of these cruel princes to oppress them. In short, if they succeeded, (as they had all the reason in the world to believe they should) the evils they had endured would quickly be compensated with rest and quiet; they would get immortal glory by this brave and spirited action; and they would not only rescue themselves and their country from servitude and misery, but be the happy instruments of establishing their future liberties on a more sure foundation, than they had now a long while enjoyed them. — Animated therefore with these considerations they pursued. And success attended the pursuit. They took not only the princes, but the two kings of Midian, and discomfited all the host. Thus were the Israelites delivered out of the hands of their oppressors, and restored to the enjoyment of their former liberties and privileges.

And

And now, many useful reflections might be made on this extraordinary story — on the miserable and helpless state to which the people of Israel were reduced, when God thus appeared for them; and which was the effect of their sins — on the great mercy of God in hearing their cries when they called upon him — on the seasonableness of their salvation, and the extraordinary means by which it was obtained — and on the valor of Gideon and his men in pursuing the advantages which God had given them. On these things, I say, we might make many useful reflections of a general kind.

Nay, as the Jewish state had a reference to the Christian, and the events of the one were many of them figurative of that great event which took place at the establishment of the other; I might accommodate this story of the redemption of Israel to our redemption by Christ. I might shew you that the subjection of mankind to sin and Satan and death, is far more abject and wretched than that of the Israelites to the princes of Midian — that as *their* deliverance was of God, so is *ours* — that as God raised *them* up a saviour from the lowest of the people, and who was yet a mighty man of valor; so he has raised *us* up a Saviour out of Nazareth,

reth, and who is yet his own Son — that as *their* salvation was evidently owing to the divine interposition, and yet was not effected without means; so is *ours* — and that as the advantages of that victory which Gideon obtained for them, were to be eagerly pursued by them; so we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, and to oppose with vigor our spiritual enemies, knowing that Christ by his death has secured the victory for us. On all these things I might enlarge: but I shall wave most of them, and take up only the last idea mentioned. —

Christ by his death has obtained a conquest for us over all the powers of darkness: but our enemies are not so far defeated as not to exist, or to be totally discouraged from any farther attempt towards our ruin. Animated therefore by what our Captain has done, and the advantages we have ourselves already gained, we are to push the victory. It is a warfare, and a painful one too; and it may be we are sometimes upon the point of *fainting*. But, *though faint, we must pursue*. — Now in order to excite you to the great duty of perseverance in religion, to which you see I have accommodated

modated the language of the text, I propose,

I. Briefly to describe the Christian warfare; and,

II. To consider the various temper and conduct of the good man amidst the fatigues and dangers of it; and the reasons of his faintness on the one hand, and of his resolution to persevere on the other.

I. Let me give you some general description of the Christian warfare.

The life of a real disciple of Jesus is frequently thus represented in scripture. *War a good warfare^m. Fight the good fight of faithⁿ. Endure hardness, as a good soldier of Christ^o.* — If it be asked, What is the Cause he asserts? and what are the grounds of the quarrel? I answer, It is the cause of God and Christ, the cause of truth and liberty, a cause in which his present interest, and his future and everlasting welfare are intimately concerned. It is a dispute upon a question of infinite importance,

^m 1 Tim. i. 18. ⁿ ch. vi. 12. ^o 2 Tim. ii. 2, 3.

Whether

Whether he shall be happy or miserable? a slave to the most cruel and despotic tyrants, or a servant to him who alone can make him free? — If it be asked, Who the *Enemies* are with whom he has to contend? They are these -- Satan the prince of the power of the air, that great foe of God and man, who, *as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour* * -- Wicked men, and the opposers of Christ, who are the emissaries of Satan -- The world with all its pomps and vanities -- And the evil passions and corruptions of the heart. Enemies numerous subtle and malicious. Strong ones, who have wounded and cast down thousands; who give no quarter, but to those who will quietly yield to their usurpation, and ignominiously submit to their unlawful power; and who, if they cannot conquer, will do their utmost to distress afflict and torment. Enemies who are ever upon the watch, either artfully to betray the Christian into sin, or else openly to assault him with temptation. — The *Conflict*, it may from hence be concluded, is often fierce and violent, and sometimes to appearance of very doubtful issue. Many are the struggles the good man suffers within, betwixt flesh and spirit, grace and corruption.

* 2 Pet. v. 8.

Many

Many the attacks made upon him by the objects of sense, by the alluring prospects of gain honor and pleasure, and by the threats of poverty reproach and persecution. Many the trials he endures from pride unbelief sloth passion and other evil affections. Many the subtle and perhaps blasphemous insinuations of the great adversary. And many the doubts fears and tumults of his own breast. Sometimes victory seems to incline on the side of the Christian, and at other times on that of the enemy. — And then as to the *Captain* under whose banner he fights, and the *Weapons* with which he is furnished for the battle. Christ is his Captain; an able skilful generous commander; who has himself waged war with these enemies, and bravely withstood their united and most violent assaults; who by his grace has called the Christian into the field, armed him for the fight, and assured him of all needful supports in the time of temptation and danger. The shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, and the sword of the Spirit, are the weapons he has provided; and success he has promised to all them who heartily engage in his service. — In a word, the great

Object proposed is the total overthrow of sin Satan and death; a happy manumission or freedom from the servitude of these base and cruel tyrants; and the everlasting enjoyment of God in the world to come. — A noble warfare this! A warfare in which, you see, by reason of the corrupt and apostate state of human nature, we are necessarily engaged, unless we will be for ever miserable. A warfare which promises the happiest success, as it is founded in the mediation of the Son of God. And a warfare in which millions have been engaged before us, prophets apostles and martyrs, yea the blessed Jesus himself. In fine, a warfare, which, though it be painful, is but short; and which, though it may draw after it many outward inconveniencies and many inward sorrows, yet is glorious in itself, and shall in the issue be crowned with joys and triumphs and pleasures inconceivable and without end.

Thus you have a general view of this warfare. Which leads me to consider,

II. The various temper and conduct of the Christian amidst the toils and labors of it; and the reasons of his many discouragements on the one hand, and of his resolution

tion to persevere on the other. We cannot surely, under certain circumstances, better describe him than as *faint, yet pursuing*.

FIRST. Let us view him, as he sometimes is, *faint* and dispirited.

The most intrepid soldier that ever took the field, has upon some occasions trembled, or however felt a degree of timidity. And the man whose constitution is the most robust and healthful, cannot always boast of an exemption from faintness and weariness. No wonder then that such, at certain intervals, is the sad experience of the Christian in regard of the great concerns of religion. Ah! how do his spirits languish, and his strength fail him! What anxious care is there in his countenance, and what feebleness in his hands! His soul melts like wax within him, and his knees smite one against another. He knows not how to march forward, how to charge the enemy, or how to use the weapons given him. The powers of his mind are as it were sunk and broken, and the very nerves of his soul relaxed and enfeebled. So it sometimes was with David, as appears from his many sorrowful complaints in the book of Psalms.

And so it was with the disciples of our Lord, at the instant their Master was contending with the powers of darkness. But how is this? To what is it to be ascribed? Why perhaps,

1. To the past toils and labors they have endured.

He who has borne the hardships of a long campaign, or is just emerged from some furious encounter with the enemy, or halts a moment in the midst of a long pursuit, will be apt to feel some degree of lassitude and weariness. His spirits will flag, and his heart faint. In like manner will the Christian be affected with the fatigues of his warfare. Frequent and daily struggles with inward corruptions, and with outward temptations, will oppress and sink even his animal spirits, especially when he has been foiled, or the enemy through surprize has gained any advantage against him. It is sad to hear the complaints that now and then drop from his lips. “ Ah! how long shall I be thus
 “ dispirited and almost worn out with the
 “ incessant clamor, and repeated vexatious
 “ attacks of these foolish passions! How
 “ long shall the world with its anxious
 “ cares and concerns, its vain hopes and
 “ prospects, assault my judgment, and lead
 I “ captive

“captive my affections! Wo is me that I
“sojourn in Meshech and dwell in the tents
“of Kedar! O that I had the wings of a
“dove! then would I fly away and be at
“rest.” It was this kind of faintness in
his warfare, which in a degree however the
apostle felt, when he uttered that sorrowful
complaint — *O wretched man that I am,
who shall deliver me from the body of this
death*^p? And the like was the experience
of the holy psalmist when he cried out,
*My soul cleaveth to the dust: quicken thou
me according to thy word*^q.

In such manner also is the Christian
sometimes affected by the active duties
and services of his profession. The work
indeed to which Christ calls us, brings
in the end its own reward with it: *Great
peace have they which love thy law, and
nothing shall offend them*^r. And in keep-
ing his commands there is great reward^s.
Yet there is no serving the interests of
religion, especially in some particular sta-
tions, without suffering pain and fatigue.
He who is zealous for the glory of God,
and laborious in his endeavours to do
good, will on some occasions, through
an extraordinary exertion of his spirits and

^p Rom. vii. 24. ^q Psal. cxix. 25. ^r Ps. cxix. 165.

^s Ps. xix. 11.

strength, feel great lassitude and weariness. Nor is it possible to struggle long with the passions and prejudices of wicked men, and boldly to stem the torrent of vice and sin, which ever exposes such who attempt it to more or less reproach and persecution, without sometimes enduring a languor and depression of animal nature. — His fatigues then of body and mind, arising from repeated conflicts with sin and sense, with Satan the world and his own heart, and from the labors of his particular station and calling, are one cause of the Christian's fainting.

2. This sad circumstance may sometimes be owing to the want of proper refreshment.

The people who under Saul pursued the Philistines, not having tasted food for a whole day, it is said, *fainted*^t. Nor was it to be wondered at. Without the seasonable and necessary supports of life a man's spirits will sink and his strength fail him. Such then, in another sense, is the cause of that languor and weariness the Christian sometimes feels. The immortal mind requires food to sustain it, as well as the body. Its views desires hopes and expectations must be fed and kept alive by objects suited to its renewed nature, or it will grow faint and

^t 1 Sam. xiv. 31,

sickly.

sickly. And, blessed be God! there is in the gospel of Christ, in its doctrines and promises, the richest entertainment for the faith and hope of a Christian. But alas! sometimes, through the ill state of his spiritual health, he has little or no appetite to these provisions. Or if he has, yet, through the want of the divine blessing, they do not refresh and nourish him as might be wished. Now when God with-holds his enlivening presence, when past chearful scenes are forgotten, when future bright and animating prospects are veiled, and when perplexing doubts arise as to his interest in the divine favor, is it strange that he faints? — that his soul, like David's, is *cast down within him**? — and that like him of whom Isaiah speaks, *walking in darkness and seeing no light*, he is gloomy afflicted and discouraged*?

And this is the sad and mournful experience of some Christians in the midst of their warfare, and of those too who in the general are hearty and resolute in the cause of religion. Hungry and weary their souls faint within them. And how in these circumstances to contend with the powers of darkness they know not. Like the Jews in their captive state, they hang

* Psalm xliii. 5.

* Isa. l. 10.

their harps on the willows, and have no heart to sing the song of the Lord in a strange land. But such dejection as this, however uncomfortable and distressing for the present, may and will in the end turn to their account. A wise and merciful God permits them to faint for a while, that perceiving their own weakness, they may be secured from presumption and self-confidence; and that he may magnify his grace in the relief and comfort he designs in their extremity to afford them. So the apostle was just on the point of fainting, when the Captain under whose banner he fought, and of whom he had thrice besought assistance, said unto him, *My grace is sufficient for thee*^v. Again,

3. They sometimes faint through the dread of being overcome.

This is the case, at certain seasons, with the best of men, and those who upon the whole are not chargeable with pusillanimity and cowardice. And how such fear is generated in the heart may be easily imagined. To be modest diffident jealous and suspicious, I mean in regard of himself and the dangers to which he is exposed, is the proper character of a real Christian. Now these tempers, when ba-

^v 2 Cor. xii. 9.

lanced with a lively faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the influence of divine providence and grace, are of the greatest use and subserve the most important purposes. But when the good man loses sight of these great objects, and is overwhelmed with the darkness and discouragements of unbelief, it is easy to see how his humility diffidence and jealousy must degenerate into servile and distressing fears. In such a sad situation he views the enemy in the most formidable light. The powers he has to contend with seem to him unconquerable; as did the Canaanites to the men of Israel, upon the report of the spies. Their strength malice and address strike him with the utmost dread. And while he reflects how many have been subdued by their oppressive power, and how feeble are his warmest efforts to resist them; forgetting at the same time the advantages he has already gained and the aid and support promised him in the bible; while I say he is thus enveloped in darkness, and surrounded on every side with gloomy objects, he can hardly forbear pronouncing victory on the side of the enemy: "Ah! I shall one day perish by their hand," as said David of Saul^z. Thus enervated and bro-

^z 1 Sam. xxvii. 1.

ken, no wonder he faints, or at least is in a disposition to faint.

Yet, amidst all — though his past fatigues have been great — though he is in want of present refreshment — and though he is nearly overwhelmed with the sad apprehension of being overcome; he still resolves in the strength of God he will *pursue*.

The grounds of this resolution are next to be considered. In the mean time let us make two or three reflections on what hath been said.

I. We see that undisturbed rest and tranquillity are not to be expected here. Of life in general it may be affirmed, that it is a warfare. But the idea is peculiarly applicable to the present state and condition of a Christian. Wherefore they greatly mistake it, who enter upon a profession of religion with high expectations of enjoying an uninterrupted series of felicity. This in the nature of things cannot be. The very idea of a warfare teaches the contrary. Take heed then, Sirs, how you entertain such flattering hopes as these. Religion, 'tis true, is the most chearful thing in the world. It is the best remedy for our fears, and the noblest cordial for our fainting spirits,

spirits, amidst the vicissitudes and troubles of life. Yet, such is the depravity of human nature, so powerful are the impressions which sensible objects make upon our hearts, so inconstant our passions, and so various our frames, that we do not, we cannot always enjoy that composure satisfaction and pleasure, which religion in its own proper nature is adapted to excite and promote. Nor is it fit we should. For if this were the case, we should be apt to consider the present state as our rest, and be in no disposition to strike our tents, and march forward to the promised land. Besides, there are purposes of as great real utility to be served by the difficulties and sorrows the Christian endures in his way to heaven, as by the hopes and comforts with which he is sometimes distinguished. Think it not strange then that you are frequently dispirited, fatigued and cast down. Such has been the lot of other good men before you. This is a state of warfare. You are in an enemy's country; at best like a way-faring man at an inn, not yet come to the rest, the inheritance which the Lord your God hath given you^b.

^b Ex vita ita discedo tanquam ex hospitio, non tanquam ex domo: commorandi enim natura diversorium nobis, non habitandi locum dedit.

Cic. *De Senect.* 23.

2. The Christian, you see, may be reduced very low, and yet not overcome. This I mention for the encouragement of the truly sincere and humble disciple of Jesus, who is almost overwhelmed with doubts and fears as to the issue of the conflict. It is no uncommon thing for persons in these circumstances to improve that dejection of mind they feel into an argument against themselves, and to reason from thence that God has forsaken them, and that therefore they shall fall by the hands of their enemies. But, besides the consideration just now mentioned that others have been as deeply dejected as you, it should be remembered, that your dejection may turn to your account, provided it be not unreasonably indulged. God often permits us to feel our own weakness, that we may with the greater fervency implore divine assistance. And when this is the case, we are in much less real danger, however gloomy and discouraging our own apprehensions may be, than if we were self-confident rash and precipitate. It hath also frequently been observed, that when the enemy, elated by some sudden and partial success, have presumptuously called the day their own, there hath been a turn in favor
of

of the oppressed party, succours have come in to their relief, they have rallied again, and returned to the fight with greater resolution and success than ever. And why may you not hope that this will be your case? Be of good courage, Christian. Stand to your post. Trust in God. And depend upon it, obstinate as the assault may be, you shall yet come off more than conqueror through him who hath loved you.

3. Let those who have as yet felt little faintness in this conflict, take heed how they presume. Firmness of natural constitution, vigor of animal spirits, and the warm zeal of early life in the cause of religion, do sometimes prove snares to persons of an upright mind. The commendable caution and thoughtfulness of other Christians they are apt to construe into indifference and sloth; and are too prone, through want of experience and reflection, to conclude concerning themselves, that they are superior to every possible difficulty and discouragement. If I speak to any such, let me intreat you, Sirs, to beware how you indulge this uncharitable and vain temper of mind. Every approach towards self-confidence and presumption is dangerous, and
will

will give the enemy an advantage against you. Let not him that girdeth on his harness, boast himself as he that putteth it off. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. God sometimes permits the youths to be faint and weary, and the young men to fall; while in his great mercy he giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength *. Mingle therefore caution with your zeal, and self-diffidence with all your firmness and resolution.

* Isa. xl. 29, 30.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE XIV.

PART II.

WE have seen the Christian *fainting*
amidst the fatigues of his warfare.
And we are now to view him,

SECONDLY, Resuming his wonted courage, and in the strength of divine grace, resolving to *pursue*. “ He will not ignominiously submit. No. He will keep the field — maintain the conflict — push the victory.” A brave resolution this. A resolution to which he feels himself impelled by gratitude duty and interest. He considers what will be the consequence of yielding on the one hand, and of pursuing on the other. In order therefore to animate you, Christians, to perseverance, let me represent to you these consequences in all their solemnity and importance.

I. What

I. What will be the effect, should you throw down your arms, yield to the enemy, and apostatize from your profession?

I am satisfied indeed, that he who is well affected to the cause of Christ, and engages in it upon right principles, will be victorious. Of this we may be assured not only from the nature of religion itself, which is described as *a well of water springing up to everlasting life^c*, as the *anointing which abideth in them that have received it*, and as *seed which remaineth in him who is born of God^d*; but likewise from many clear and express promises to that purpose, which I must not stay here to recite. Yet it is very observable, that the Christian is frequently so addressed exhorted and reasoned with in the bible, as if the event of his profession were doubtful. *Let us fear lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it^e. Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for, if ye do these things, ye shall never fall^f.* And the apostle, having exhorted the Corinthians *so to run as that they might obtain*, thus speaks concerning himself; *I keep under my body, and bring it*

^c John iv. 14. ^d 1 John ii. 27.; iii. 9. ^e Heb. iv. 1.
^f 2 Pet. i. 10.

*into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away*². Now, though the event is well-known to God, and he will most certainly fulfil the unalterable promises of his grace; yet there is the greatest propriety in these admonitions and cautions. For since God deals with us as reasonable creatures, and since it is unquestionably our duty to persevere; addresses of this sort are the fittest means to quicken us to diligence and watchfulness, and so to subserve the great end which infinite wisdom and mercy propose, even our everlasting salvation. The utility also of these general exhortations clearly appears from a reflection, that men are prone to deceive themselves as to their state towards God, and that the characters of good and bad are too often blended under a profession of religion. I am fully justified therefore by the example of scripture, and that founded on the truest reason, in warning the Christian of the dreadful consequences of apostacy, and so urging him to perseverance. Consider then,

1. That, if you are so unhappy as to yield, you will lose the advantages you have already gained. So says the apostle John,

² 1 Cor. ix. 24, 27.

Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward^a. He who has been any time engaged in this warfare, must needs have reaped some of the fruits of it. And how sad! to struggle, and then yield; to get the victory in a few instances, and through weariness and inconstancy to lose the benefit resulting from it. Some there are of this character, who having set their hand to the plow look back. Nor is their condition to be enough lamented! With at least an appearance of zeal and resolution they commenced the disciples of Jesus, and for a while gave fair and promising hopes to those around them, that they would shine with distinguished lustre in the rank they filled. Advantages they had gained. They had reformed their lives, shook off their former vain company, got the better of some ill habits, assumed the venerable name of Christians, and perhaps endured reproach for the sake of religion. But alas! they grew weary, they desisted, they gave out. And such was the sad issue of all their faint struggles, their heartless prayers, their partial reformations. O what pity! *Ye did run well*, we may say to such in the

^a 2 John 8.

language of the apostle, *who did hinder? Where is the blessedness ye spake of? are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain*¹? —

Now their conduct, lamentable as it is, may be improved by the real Christian to his own unspeakable advantage. Look back on your past engagements, and say, Whether you can find it in your heart to renounce them? Call to mind what you have endured and what you have enjoyed, and ask yourself, Whether you can be content to lose the things you have thus wrought, and not to receive a full reward? You are perhaps at present borne down with doubts and fears and sorrows. But will you, after the many cries and tears you have poured out to Heaven, after the many vows and resolutions you have formed, after the many attacks you have sustained from stubborn and powerful corruptions, and after the many signal victories you have won; will you I say after all give out? If so, you have prayed in vain, you have fought in vain, you have suffered in vain, you have conquered in vain. — But it is farther to be remembered,

¹ Gal. v. 7. — iv. 15. — iii. 3, 4.

2. That if you do not *pursue*, you will not only lose the advantages you have gained, but you will be overcome. And what so much to be dreaded as a defeat, a total defeat, a defeat in such a cause as this, and which draws after it consequences the most important and alarming? Here *Shame* and *Misery* present themselves to our view. Nor let us hastily dismiss them from our attention. Give them a place, Christian, at least for a while, in your most serious thoughts. I speak to him who instead of renewing the fight, parlies with temptation; who instead of enduring hardness as a good soldier of Christ, is unhappily sunk into a careless neutral indolent state.

Dread of *Shame* is a powerful incentive to action. It is so with every brave and ingenuous mind. And if to conquer is glorious^k, to be conquered, especially in the cause you are engaged and in the situation you are placed, must be base and ignominious to the last degree. The triumphs of Satan! the triumphs of the world! the triumphs of inbred lusts and passions! how ungrateful, how mortifying, how insufferable in the ear of him who hath conceived a sovereign contempt for these enemies of

^k Καλὸν τὸ νικᾶν. Eurip. Phæn. 1206.

God and man! and who hath long since judged their usurpation and dominion, the most abject and wretched yoke that can possibly be imposed on an immortal mind! And yet these taunts, these reproaches you must endure, if you submit. To this purpose our Saviour speaks, under a different metaphor, *If a man lay the foundation of a building, and is not able to finish it, they that behold it will begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish*¹. — Consider likewise, Christian, the dishonor which such a base submission may reflect, through the perverse reasonings of wicked men, on the noble cause you have asserted, on the generous Captain under whose banner you fight, and on the brave company in which you are inrolled. A thought this which cannot but sensibly touch his heart, who enters into the genuine spirit of religion, and feels an unconquerable attachment to Christ and to his fellow-disciples. It is a striking passage of one of the ancient fathers, who, in order to rouse Christians from their sloth and to animate them in their warfare, represents Satan as thus contrasting the services of his disciples to those of Christ's disciples, and so upbraiding him with the baseness

¹ Luke xiv. 29, 30.

and perfidy of such who called themselves Christians. “ For those, O Christ, whom
“ thou seest with me, I have not been
“ buffeted scourged or crucified; I have
“ not shed my blood for them, nor re-
“ deemed them, though they are my fa-
“ mily, at the expence of my passion and
“ death: no, nor do I promise them a hea-
“ venly kingdom, or, having restored to
“ them immortality, invite them back a-
“ gain to paradise. And yet they present
“ me gifts exceeding great and precious,
“ and acquired with much pains and labor.
“ Shew me now, O Christ, any of thy
“ disciples, who, though they are instruct-
“ ed by thy precepts, and shall receive for
“ earthly heavenly things, have yet the
“ gratitude to make thee such expensive re-
“ turns as these — With these my terrene
“ and perishing gifts (meaning the *specta-*
“ *cula* or public shews frequent at that
“ time) no one is fed or cloathed or com-
“ forted: they all perish in the idle vanity
“ of deceiving pleasures, between the mad-
“ ness of him who exhibits, and of those
“ who behold them. — Thou promigest e-
“ ternal life to them that serve thee; and
“ yet thy servants, whom thou wilt thus
“ honour with divine and heavenly rewards,
“ scarcely

“scarcely equal mine who amidst all their labor perish. O! my dear brethren, adds the pious Father, what shall we answer to “these things”?” — Surely then, if the not having served Christ with that zeal and attention which his generosity and love demand, is a just occasion of shame and sorrow; disgrace and infamy must be the lot of him who absolutely deserts the service of such a Master, and enlists again under the banner of Satan.

Nor is reproach and shame the only effect of such conduct: it must, it will be followed with *Misery* both in this life, and in that which is to come. Doubtless there is some kind of pleasure which wicked men feel in the indulgence of their lusts; but is that pleasure capable of proving a temptation to you, Christian, to renounce your allegiance to Christ — you who have known what the opposite pleasures mean? Or if it may be supposed for a moment to shake your resolution; does it not lose all its force, when you come to reflect on the perplexity guilt and horror it draws after it? Can you think calmly of being reduced to your former state of vassalage and slavery, or of being treated with far greater indignity and

^m CYPRIAN. Edit. Oxon. p. 206.

cruelty, than Pharaoh treated the Israelites, or Nebuchadnezzar the Jewish Prince? Can you be content not only to be spoiled of all your wealth, and stripped of your royal raiment; but to have your eyes put out, your feet bound with fetters of brass, and a loathsome dungeon appointed you for your residence? Yet such must be your hard lot if you submit. If sin and Satan and the world triumph, it must be at the expence of truth honor peace, and every thing that is dear to you. Reason must be dethroned, the judgment perverted, the conscience enslaved, and the passions all of them led away into the most painful and wretched servitude. And can you submit to these miseries? Be it so that you are greatly dejected and borne down with past fatigues, the want of present refreshment, and doubtful apprehensions as to the issue of the combat. Yet even this state is preferable to that of a slave. If you tamely surrender yourself into the hands of your enemies, you will be held faster in the chains of captivity than ever; you will contract guilt upon your conscience, which will either sooner or later become intolerable; and the end will be ruin, total irrecoverable ruin. *When the unclean spirit, says our Saviour, is gone out of*

of

of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out, and when he is come he findeth it empty, swept and garnished. Then goeth he and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there, and the last state of that man is worse than the firstⁿ. To the same purpose says the apostle Peter, If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome; the latter end is worse than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they had known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them^o.

It is sad to describe the fearful state of the apostate, when conscience is thoroughly roused from its sleep, when the harbingers of death warn him of his approaching dissolution, and the terrors of the last judgment set themselves in array before him. His countenance, his gesture, his language loudly express the anguish of his spirit. "Ah me! how deplorable is my condi-

ⁿ Mat. xii. 43 — 45. ^o 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.

tion!

“ tion! All is darkness around me, all
“ horror and misery before me. I am un-
“ done, utterly undone. No assistance is
“ to be obtained from without, no source
“ of comfort can I find within. My con-
“ science condemns me, and the sentence of
“ a justly provoked God seals my condem-
“ nation. My friends stand aloof from me,
“ and the powers of darkness triumph over
“ me. Sorer punishment awaits me than
“ was inflicted on the disobedient Israelites.
“ And I am worthy of it, for I have trod-
“ den under foot the Son of God, I have
“ counted the blood of the covenant where-
“ with I was sanctified an unholy thing,
“ and I have done despite unto the Spirit
“ of grace. And now there remaineth no
“ more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fear-
“ ful looking for of judgment, and fiery
“ indignation which shall devour the ad-
“ versaries. O miserable wretch that I
“ am! I fall a victim, a deplorable victim
“ to my own perverseness and impiety, to
“ the rage and malice of devils, and to the
“ just resentments of him who is a consum-
“ ing fire.” And O who can imagine the
tremendous consequences? —

Will it not then be madness to halt, to
throw down your arms, to submit? — But I
forbear

forbear any farther to address the passions of shame and fear, and proceed,

II. To lay before the timorous and discouraged Christian such considerations, as are adapted to quicken and enliven him, amidst the fatigues and dangers of his spiritual warfare. Here then let me remind you,

I. Of the goodness of the cause wherein you are embarked.

There are two different and opposite interests established in our world, which divide the affections and pursuits of all mankind. The one is that of error and sin, the other that of truth and religion. Over the former presides Satan, over the latter Christ. The grand object of the God of this world is to enslave the souls of men, and to make them miserable for ever. To which end he employs in his service all the arts of error flattery and deception, and all the powers of worldly emolument, sensual gratification, and evil example. And as in the beginning he seduced and corrupted the human race, so by these measures he still farther blinds the eyes of men, hardens their hearts, captivates their affections, and confirms

confirms them in their apostacy. Under his banner the greater part of mankind is enlisted; and to his artifice, and their own corrupt inclinations, are to be ascribed all the ignorance wickedness and misery which prevail over the earth. On the contrary, the great object which Christ proposes is as generous and noble, as *his* is iniquitous and malevolent. It is to rescue men from the dominion of Satan and their lusts, to reduce them to their allegiance to the blessed God, and to make them happy both here and hereafter. And the grand mean he has appointed to this end is the gospel, wherein a discovery is made of the most interesting and important truths, all admirably adapted, with a divine influence, to throw light upon our dark minds, to give a new bias to our depraved affections, and to guide and influence our conduct. Now, it is to the guidance of this leader that you, Christian, have submitted yourself. And surely, there is every imaginable motive arising out of this great cause in which you are engaged, to inspire you with resolution and constancy.

It is the cause of truth and righteousness. If religion were a cunningly devised fable, its great author an impostor, its doctrines false and erroneous, its precepts severe and unreasonable,

unreasonable, and its promises flattering and deceitful, it were not to be wondered that you should grow faint and weary in the defence of it. Zeal in such a cause would be highly criminal; and in the end would prove as vain and fruitless, as it is base and inglorious. But the reverse is the case here. Religion is founded in the truest reason, and is most acceptable to God. You have no doubt, Christian, that the dominion which Satan claims over mankind is a most iniquitous and cruel usurpation, and that the principles passions and pursuits of the men of this world, are a shameful perversion of all the laws of truth equity and goodness. You are well assured that Jesus your Almighty Saviour came from God, that the great object of his mission was not only most just and equitable but generous and kind, that his doctrine is according to godliness, his precepts fit and becoming, and his promises faithful and true. In a cause therefore so righteous in itself, and in favor of which God has given the clearest and fullest attestations, you may, you ought to be courageous. Great is the truth, and it will prevail.

It is also farther to be remembered, that this is a cause to which you are attached
by

by all possible obligations of gratitude and love. You fight in defence of the honor interest and kingdom, not only of your rightful Sovereign, but of your great Deliverer and Friend. If the ardent concern of a prince for the happiness of his subjects, if his condescending to the meanest offices, his enduring the most painful labors, and exposing himself to the greatest hazards to secure and promote their essential interests, are reasons why they should cheerfully venture their lives and fortunes in his service; motives of this sort may be urged with peculiar advantage in the present case. It is impossible fully to describe the cordial and unshaken affection of Christ for his disciples, the disgrace pain and anguish he has endured on their behalf, and the exalted honors joys and pleasures he has procured for them, at the expence of his precious blood. Think of the bliss and glory he possessed in the world above. Contemplate the humble form in which he appeared here on earth. Call up to your view his immense labors and exquisite sufferings. Follow him from Bethlehem to Golgotha. View him resolutely contending with the powers of darkness, patiently bearing the cruel abuse of Jews and Romans, and

and meekly offering his life a sacrifice to divine justice on the cross — doing and suffering all this, to reconcile you to God, to set you free from the slavery of sin, to secure to you the substantial blessings of religion here, and to intitle you to a crown of glory hereafter. Reflect on these things, and say, Whether so kind a Friend, so generous a Saviour, and so renowned a Prince, may not demand your warmest affection, your firmest allegiance, and your most unwearied services? Does not the lively remembrance of these great obligations inspire you with new resolution and vigor, when discouraged and borne down with the fatigues of your warfare?

Nor is it to be forgotten, that this is a cause wherein your own interest is nearly concerned. That was the object which, as you have seen, the Son of God proposed in becoming the Captain of your salvation. And, whilst you are fighting under his banner, you are pursuing that object. You are contending not for the perishing enjoyments of this world, but for unfading honors, substantial pleasures, durable riches and righteousness. And can you be neutral or indifferent in a cause so essentially important as this? Or shall it be in the
power

power of the enemy, by any kind of opposition, to intimidate you, when the question is, Whether you shall be happy or miserable, the vassal of Satan or a servant of the living God? Every advantage you gain against your lusts possesses you of a present reward. And are not peace of conscience, a sense of the divine favor, and a joyful hope of future and endless felicity, objects deserving of your most ardent attention and pursuit? — Blessings which will more than compensate all the discouragements pains and sorrows you endure, in your conflicts with sin and sense? — In a cause therefore so just, so noble, so interesting, it is criminal to be indifferent; it is dishonourable to be timorous.

2. Another animating consideration is, the seasonable and effectual support you may depend upon receiving, in the course of your warfare.

It were wrong to flatter ourselves with a notion, that the difficulties we have to contend with as Christians, are few occasional and of trifling consequence. He who hath any knowledge of his own heart, and is at all acquainted with the world, must be sensible that this is a very great mistake. Nor am I afraid even to magnify these

these difficulties, while I have such encouragements and assistances to oppose to them, as the word of God insures, and the wisest and best of men have found to be every way adequate and sufficient. Admitting then that you have very many corruptions to struggle with; that your worldly connections businesses and concerns are all of them exceedingly perplexing and ensnaring; that Satan and his emissaries use their utmost endeavours to subdue and enslave you; that you have little knowledge and experience, many prejudices and weaknesses, a deceitful heart and inconstant passions; and, in fine, that you are, of yourself, unequal to the powerful united and continued assaults of these your enemies: Yet you have no reason, Christian, to be discouraged. Say not, in the language of Elisha's servant, when he beheld the city encompassed with a host of the Syrians, *Alas, Master, how shall we do?* For it may be replied in the words of the prophet, *They that be with us, are more than they that be with them*^p.

God is with you: nor have you any just ground to question it. The cause is his. You engaged in it, at his instance,

^p 2 Kings vi. 15, 16.

with the help of his grace, and from a desire to approve yourself to him, as well as to escape the miseries with which you was threatened. Think you then that he will desert you, or that he will withhold that support you need? He will not. He hath said he will not. And he is faithful who hath promised. *Fear not, I am with thee; be not dismayed, I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness¹. My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness². No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper³. I will never leave thee nor forsake thee⁴. You may therefore boldly say, *The Lord is my helper⁵; through God I shall do valiantly; for he it is that shall tread down my enemies⁶*. Guided by unerring wisdom, defended by almighty power, and sustained by infinite compassion and goodness, what dangers may you not escape! what difficulties may you not surmount! what wonders may you not perform!*

Christ also is your Captain. And, in his character conduct and example, you have

¹ Isa. xli. 10. ² 2 Cor. xii. 9. ³ Isa. liii. 17. ⁴ Heb. xiii. 5. ⁵ Ver. 6. ⁶ Psal. lx. 12.

every possible consideration to animate and encourage you. Need I remind you of the transcendent excellencies he possesses, his skill and address, his magnanimity and resolution, his tenderness and love? These he eminently displayed, during his own personal conflict with the powers of darkness, in the days of his flesh. And now he is in heaven, he exerts them for the defence and support of his followers in their militant state. He was made perfect through sufferings, that he might bring many sons unto glory. To give them a title to victory he died, and to secure the victory to them he lives. For this great purpose he employs all his influence on their behalf; an influence which extends over universal nature, and is subject to no controul whatever. With his divine Father he uses his interest, in the character of Mediator, that they may prevail. The affairs of providence he adjusts in such a manner as to contribute to the success of their cause. The malice of their enemies he restrains, their schemes he detects and counteracts, and their haughty power he checks and subdues. With a compassionate eye he looks down upon them, when overwhelmed with the troubles of life, when wearied and broken by painful conflicts with sin

and sense, and when discouraged and oppressed with numerous and grievous temptations. Nor does he fail, on certain occasions, by various means, such as his word, his ordinances, and the seasonable influence of his grace and Spirit, to comfort their drooping hearts and to strengthen their feeble hands. *The bruised reed he will not break, and the smoking flax he will not quench, until he send forth judgment unto victory*^{*}. And have not these considerations, Christian, thus addressed to your own feelings, the most animating effect?

I might here also put you in mind of the weapons with which you are furnished, the company in which you are enlisted, and the wages you receive. You do not meet the enemy naked and defenceless. He who leads you into the field, first commands you to *put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand*[†]. Truth is your girdle, righteousness your breastplate, faith your shield, salvation your helmet, the word of God your sword, and your feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Your fellow-soldiers are the excellent of the

^{*} Matth. xii. 20.[†] Eph. vi. 10 — 18.

earth, the loyal subjects of the Prince of Peace, the sons of God, the heirs of glory — not a few only, but an hundred and forty and four thousand, and thousands of thousands, whom no man can number. And the wages appointed you are adequate to your necessities, yea more than enough for your subsistence, such I may add as will largely compensate all your pains and sorrows; even the satisfactions of a peaceful conscience, the pleasures resulting from communion with God, and the joys on certain occasions which arise from the unclouded prospect of a future blessed immortality.

And now, clad in armour proof against every assault — led on by a Captain of unconquerable magnanimity — supported by a numerous body of saints and confessors, all shouting, **THE SWORD OF THE LORD AND HIS CHRIST** — angels with wishful eyes waiting the event — a cloud of witnesses on every side marking your conduct — and you yourself, Christian, pouring out incessant cries to Heaven to prosper the enterprise — I say, thus advancing, in defence of the noblest cause that was ever asserted, and relying upon the power and

faithfulness of Almighty God, What have you to fear? — Victory, complete victory, shall crown the day. And so I am led,

3. And lastly, To describe the triumph which will succeed the fatigues and dangers of this painful warfare —

Describe it did I say? It is not to be fully described. The utmost I can do is only to draw out some faint and general representation of it. The scene will be glorious beyond all imagination, as may naturally be concluded from the greatness of the cause, the fierceness of the contention, the zeal with which Christ has interested himself in it, and the important consequences it draws after it. If to subdue, totally subdue, the most haughty cruel and powerful enemies; if to emerge, in the full enjoyment of health, out of all the horrors of war; if to return home, richly laden with the spoils of victory; if to be crowned with the applauses of his prince and his country, and henceforth quietly to possess not only his liberties, but an affluence of all earthly good; if these are the prospects which animate the soldier in the day of battle, and push him on to the most hazardous enterprises; What may not you, Christian, expect

pect as the fruit of that far more noble conflict in which you are engaged? The moment death has done his office, your toils and pains and sorrows shall for ever cease, and an endless duration of unutterable bliss and glory commence. Amidst the applauding shouts of friendly angels, and the joyful congratulations of fellow-saints, your immortal spirit shall ascend to the mansions of the blessed. Jesus, the great Captain of your salvation, shall welcome you thither, and in the presence of that illustrious assembly with his own lips pronounce you conqueror. "This is he who dared to
" enter the lists with the powers of darkness, maintained the fight amidst a thousand dangers, and has now won the prize.
" I saw him, bravely asserting the cause of
" God and truth, and resolutely contending with his own heart, the world, and
" the devil. I beheld him amidst the many
" vicissitudes of this short but painful warfare — sometimes almost borne down by
" ignorance and error, prejudice and passion, flattery and reproach, perplexing
" doubts and discouraging fears — and then,
" animated by a ray of divine hope, resum-
" ing fresh courage, and resolving in the

“strength of God to conquer or die. His
“silent reasonings I noticed. His sorrow-
“ful complaints I watched. His earnest
“cries I heard. The aid he implored was
“granted him. Out of weakness he be-
“came strong. He waxed valiant in fight.
“The armies of sin and death he put to
“flight. *Though faint he pursued.* The
“last blow is now given. His warfare is
“accomplished. Well done good and
“faithful servant! enter thou into the joy
“of thy Lord.” So shall he be arrayed
with the robes that conquerors wear; and
receive, at the hands of Jesus the righteous
Judge, the palm of victory and diadem of
glory. And O! what rapturous joys will
circulate around his heart, while he reflects
on the dangers he has escaped, and remem-
bers with infinite gratitude that the victory,
glorious as it is, is wholly to be ascribed to the
blood of the Lamb! While he feels within
the satisfactions which result from a consciouf-
ness of perfect knowledge purity and hap-
piness! While he casts his eye around him
upon the bright and numerous assembly to
which he is united! and while he looks
forward to a duration of felicity and glory
which shall know no end!

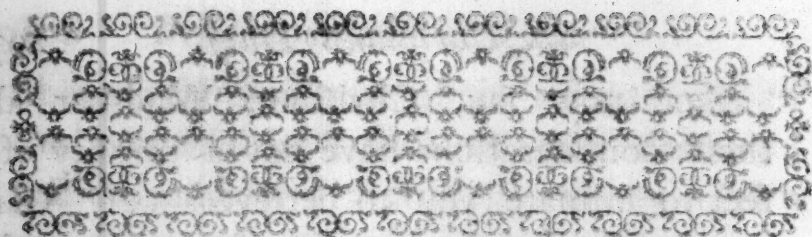
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And now say, Christian, Whether all these considerations have not a mighty effect to animate you to perseverance? Can you resist their united force? — the goodness of the cause — the reasonable and effectual support you may depend upon receiving — and the victory, the glorious victory, which shall crown the day. Be persuaded therefore, *though faint, yet to pursue* —

Well done, accomplished. faithful servant! enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. So shall he be arrayed with the robes that conquerors wear; and receive, at the hands of Jesus the righteous Judge, the palm of victory and diadem of glory. And O! what rapturous joys will circulate around his heart, while he reflects on the dangers he has escaped, and remembers with infinite gratitude that the victory, glorious as it is, is wholly to be ascribed to the blood of the Lamb! While he feels within the satisfactions which result from a consciousness of perfect knowledge, purity and happiness! While he casts his eye around him upon the bright and numerous assembly to which he is united! and while he looks forward to a duration of felicity and glory

DISCOURSE no end!

And



DISCOURSE XV.

Religion an abiding Principle.



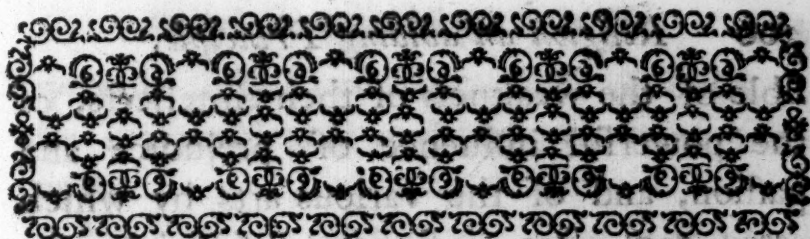
PART I.



PHILIPPIANS I. 6.

Being confident of this very thing, that he
which hath begun a good work in you, will
perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

CONFIDENCE, in matters of a
doubtful nature, is generally
considered as an exhibition of
great ignorance and folly. And
with good reason—For if men were sen-
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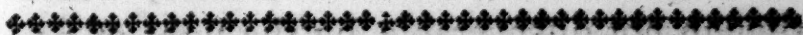


DISCOURSE XV.

Religion an abiding Principle.



PART I.



PHILIPPIANS i. 6.

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

CONFIDENCE, in matters of a doubtful nature, is generally considered as an expression of great ignorance and folly. And with good reason — For if men were sensible

sible of the weakness of their intellects, of the powerful influence of prejudice and passion, and of the various arts by which error too often insinuates itself into the mind; they would be cautious how they hastily pronounced upon either opinions or facts, where the evidence is at all defective. Yet, a modest diffidence of our own judgment will by no means justify scepticism, or a continual habit of doubting. There are some truths so plain and self-evident, that it would argue a criminal disaffection of the heart to them, as well as a most unreasonable incredulity, were we to withhold our assent. And there are others, which though not discoverable by the light of nature, yet being clearly laid down in scripture, we may be confident of their authenticity. And even these will admit of such an appeal to impartial reason, as serves rather to strengthen than diminish their force. Men divinely inspired might, indeed, peremptorily demand the credit of their hearers to the doctrines and facts they reported to them, without entering into a particular explanation of them. Yet, we find both Christ and his apostles taking pains to establish the principles, upon which the truths they delivered were founded, in order thereby

by more fully to convince their disciples of the reasonableness and importance of such truths.

An instance of this we have in the passage just read. That spirit of discernment with which the apostle was endued, might perhaps have authorised him to pronounce confidently concerning the future state of the Philippians, and upon such issue he might have put the matter. He however does not rest the argument here; but enters into the principles and grounds of his confidence, which were in every view as level to their comprehension and conviction as to his. With pleasure *he remembered their fellowship in the gospel*, that is, their holy humble exemplary behaviour, from the beginning of their profession until that time. From thence he clearly inferred the soundness of their conversion. And being satisfied that their conversion was the work of God, he from this principle fairly concluded, that what God had thus begun he would in due time bring to perfection. This was a kind of reasoning obvious to the plainest understanding; and which may, I think, without the charge of rashness or undue confidence, be applied to the character and state of every real Christian. I propose

propose therefore, in discoursing of this subject, to consider more particularly,

I. What this important matter is, of which we may be confident concerning every man of true religion; and,

II. The grounds of this confidence.

I. As to the matter of which we may be confident, it is this — *That God will perform the good work he hath begun in the real Christian, until the day of Jesus Christ.*

Religion is manifestly the thing here intended. What that is we have largely considered in the preceding discourses. In order, however, to throw light on the subject we are now discussing, it will be proper to attend a while to the description given us of it in this passage.

I. It is *a work wrought in the soul of man.*

Now a work, of whatever kind it is, implies design activity and an exertion of skill and strength. Ideas which are applicable to religion in its rise progress and final completion; and more especially as it concerns the heart or inward man, for there

this

this work is said to be wrought. *We are his workmanship*, says the apostle to the Ephesians*. The soul of man, in an unrenewed state, resembles a building in ruins. It was once a fair and beautiful temple, the residence of the blessed God, and sacred to his service. But alas! it is now defaced and spoiled. The stones of the sanctuary, to use the language of the prophet concerning the temple at Jerusalem, are poured out; the altar is thrown down; the holy fire extinguished; and the glory of the Lord departed. All the faculties of the mind are enervated and broken, overspread with darkness and error, and wretchedly polluted and depraved. The great object therefore of religion is the renovation of the soul, the rebuilding this temple, and the fitting it again for the service and enjoyment of God. A work this truly noble and important, but attended with much expence labor and opposition. The plan is laid in the sacred records, and suitable means are provided for carrying it into execution. The materials are chosen fashioned and cemented. And thus the building fitly framed and beautified, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord, and becomes an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Spirit. The foundation is laid in deep humiliation for sin, and a lively faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: and the superstructure is raised, amidst many conflicts and temptations, in knowledge purity and joy. He who was ignorant of God, of his own heart, and of the great concerns of a future state, becomes wise unto salvation. He who was dead in trespasses and sins, is quickened to a life of holiness. And he who was immersed in the follies and pleasures of the world, aspires to infinitely nobler enjoyments. *He is a new creature.* There is a change in his principles views affections and manner of life. *Old things are passed away, and all things become new^a.* Now,

2. Of this work *God is the Author.* So the text expressly assures us. For he who had begun it in the Philippians, is the same Divine Person to whom the apostle had offered his thanks, in the third verse, on their behalf.

Every house is built by some man, but he who builds this temple is God. To his skill and influence we are indebted both for framing the plan, and for carrying it into execution. Others indeed are labourers together with God; nay those in whom the work is wrought are themselves command-

^a 2 Cor. v. 17.

ed to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling: yet they all act under the direction of the great Master-builder, and depend upon the effectual concurrence of his providence and grace for the success of their labors.

After what manner the Holy Spirit exerts his influence on the minds of men, to effect their conversion at first, and to maintain and promote religion in their hearts afterwards, it is not for me precisely to determine. But that there is a supernatural power exerted to these great ends, may be clearly proved from the principles of reason, in concurrence with the express testimony of scripture. This I have shewn at large in a former discourse. It will be necessary however to resume the argument here in a few words, because the main thing asserted in the text, *That this work shall be performed until the day of Christ*, very much depends upon it.

It is a truth acknowledged on all hands, that the great Father of spirits can have access to the hearts of men, and by a secret but powerful influence incline and move them as he sees fit. To deny the possibility of this is to recur to downright atheism. Nor is it unworthy of God, or at all sub-

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sonable creatures, for that great and good Being thus to irradiate our benighted minds, and give a new bent to our depraved will and affections. Our present state evidently requires it, in order to our becoming capable of serving and enjoying God: for it is a clear fact that men are naturally averse to that which is holy spiritual and good; and that all the means used to recover them to a sense of their duty and interest have been, and still are, ineffectual with the far greater part of mankind. And as the influence of the Holy Spirit is necessary for the renovation of our nature, so this doctrine is clearly revealed in the bible; and religion where-ever it prevails is constantly and invariably represented throughout that sacred book, as an effect resulting from that cause. It is God that *opens our eyes^b, enlightens our understandings^c, and directs our ways to keep his statutes^d*. It is God that *circumcises our hearts to love him^e, puts his fear in our inward parts^f, and renews a right spirit within us^g*. It is God that *works in us to will and to do of his good pleasure^h, and makes us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in*

Psal. cxix. 18. ^c Eph. i. 18. ² Cor. iv. 6. ^a Psal. cxix. 5. ^e Deut. xxx. 6. ^f Jer. xxxii. 40. ^g Psal. li. 10. ^h Philip. ii. 13.

*light*¹. We are born of the Spirit², and saved by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost³. In fine, we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works⁴. All which, you see, well agrees with the language of the text, that God begins this work in us, and performs it until the day of Christ.

Whoever therefore duly reflects on the ruinous state to which the soul of man is reduced by sin; on the prodigious expence which the Son of God has been at to procure on honourable terms the return of the Holy Spirit to our earth; on the means appointed for rebuilding beautifying and consecrating a temple for his service; the sorrow labor and difficulty which, through various causes, attend the work itself; and what scripture, as you have seen, affirms concerning the divine influence therein: whoever, I say, duly considers all these things must acknowledge that religion is indeed the work of God. — Which leads me to observe,

3. That it is a good work. So it must needs be, as it is the effect of divine skill power and goodness: but its nature and intendment will sufficiently shew it.

¹ Col. i. 12. ² John iii. 5. ³ Tit. iii. 5. ⁴ Eph. ii. 10.

Beauty and convenience are the two chief commendations of a building. If its parts are so framed and adjusted, as to please the beholder: and it is so contrived and laid out, as to furnish all needful accommodations for the inhabitant; it is a fair mansion, an agreeable dwelling. In like manner, this spiritual building is both ornamental and useful. He who hath a taste for real dignity and beauty, must acknowledge that they are qualities inseparable from true religion. Figure to yourself a Christian, who possesses all that genuine simplicity meekness humility chearfulness love of God contempt of the world and benevolence towards his fellow-creatures, which the faith of the gospel inspires; and say, Whether such a character is not truly amiable? It cannot fail of captivating the eye, and charming the heart, of him whose senses are exercised to discern good and evil. Nay, it will, it must, it does, upon some occasions at least, command the reverence of the wicked themselves. *The king's daughter, to use the figurative language of the Psalmist, is all glorious within; her cloathing is of wrought gold*ⁿ.

And sure I am, religion is as useful, as it is venerable and ornamental. The personal

ⁿ Psal. xlv. 13.

benefits which result from it are great innumerable and lasting. Not to speak of its effect to secure a man from many temporal evils; it tends directly, and in various ways, to promote the peace comfort and happiness of the mind. *Great peace have they who love thy law*, says David°. *The ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness*, says Solomon^p. And the apostle assures us, that *godliness is profitable unto all things, having a promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come*^q. Nor do they only in whom this work is wrought reap the fruits of it: others are benefited by it. The grace of God makes a man a good man. It inspires him with principles of integrity meekness humility and generosity; virtues these of general utility, and which cannot fail of rendering him who possesses them a blessing to all around him. So that the real Christian will be a dutiful and affectionate relation, a sincere and steady friend, and an honourable and useful member of society. These Philippians, in whom religion thus prevailed, were not only *blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked*

° Psal. cxix. 165. ^p Prov. iii. 17. ^q 1 Tim. iv. 8.

and perverse generation; but *they shone as lights in the world*¹. And it is true of the disciples of Christ in every age, as well as of his immediate followers, that *they are the salt of the earth*². — Now surely a work that is thus ornamental and useful must be a good work. Yet,

4. It is at present *imperfect*, a work begun in us.

As to some, little more can be said of them than that the foundation of this new building is just laid, and that there are hopeful appearances of its rising out of its former ruins. It is *the day of small things*, as the prophet speaks concerning the temple at Jerusalem³. Their knowledge scarce extends farther than the first principles of the oracles of God, and is blended with much ignorance and error. Their ideas are irregular and confused, like his in the gospel who just emerging out of blindness said, *I see men as trees, walking*⁴. Their faith though well grounded, is weak and feeble, and frequently shook with the violent assaults of temptation; so that in their perplexity they cry out, like him who besought Christ to heal his child, *Lord, I believe;*

¹ Chap. ii. 15.

² Matth. v. 13.

³ Zech. iv. 10.

⁴ Mark viii. 24.

help thou my unbelief^v. Their hope, though it holds them up from despondency, arises not to assurance; so that they dare not pronounce certainly upon their state towards God. They have a fixed abhorrence of all sin; yet not thoroughly knowing their own hearts, and not fully comprehending the devices of Satan, they are often deceived, if not overcome by its delusive and flattering appearance. They have a relish for the pure and spiritual pleasures of religion, and eagerly aspire after them; yet they feel and lament the powerful attractions and undue influence of sensible objects. In short, the principles of grace and holiness have many sinful habits and foolish passions to contend with; so that their joys are mingled with sorrows, their hopes clouded with fears, and their obedience disgraced with imperfection and sin. Thus is religion in the beginning like *Elijah's cloud*, which at first was no bigger than a man's hand, but afterwards covered the whole heavens^x. Or like *a grain of mustard-seed*, which is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree; so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the

^v Mark ix. 24.

^x 1 Kings xviii. 44, 45.

branches thereof^y. And hence our Saviour, in great compassion to his young afflicted disciples, compares them to *a bruised reed*, and *smoking flax*^z. Like a bruised reed, they are in their own apprehension most base and contemptible; and, through the sorrowfulness of their spirits, are as incapable of affording melody in the ears of others, as a musical instrument that is broken and laid aside. And like smoking flax, religion seems to them to have little strength or prevalence in their hearts; so that though the fire may have smothered there for a long while, they can scarce think it will ever burst out into a living and extinguishable flame.

And then as to Christians of longer standing and higher attainments in religion, even the work in them, when compared with the perfection it shall arrive at in heaven, is only in its beginning. You see the outlines of that fair original, after which they are a copy; but though the resemblance is striking, the picture is rude and unfinished. The superstructure is raised perhaps to a considerable height; yet there are many blemishes in the building: nay there is wood hay and stubble mingled

^y Matth. xiii. 31, 32. ^z Chap. xii. 20.

with

with the very materials of which it is composed. Original corruptions, evil habits, and early prejudices are so deeply rooted, that they are not to be totally eradicated by age experience the instructions of God's word, or the discipline of his providence. And hence those many sad and strange appearances among good men, those errors in judgment, and mistakes in conduct, which try their charity towards each other, and sometimes prove an occasion of offence and scandal to the world. A reflection this which gives rise to many sorrowful lamentations in the breast of him who truly fears God, and at certain seasons excites vehement desires after a dismissal hence. — The work however,

5. Is a *progressive* work. This the phrase of its being performed *until* the day of Christ clearly intimates.

God, as we have seen, is the author of it: and it is scarce probable that so able and skilful an architect should begin a building, and then suspend all concern about it, till just the period when it is to be finished. In some instances indeed it looks as if this were the case. So it appears to the Christian himself, when God with-holds the light of his countenance, and

and suffers him to walk in darkness. But however difficult it may be, at such seasons, to persuade ourselves that religion is in an improving state, yet so it really is. The work is advancing with perhaps swifter progress amidst these dark and gloomy experiences, than when to our view it goes on smoothly and prosperously. For however desirable the comforts of divine grace are, the great object of religion is the subduing our corruptions, and the forming our hearts to love and obedience. And if God is pursuing this object by afflictive dispensations, as he most certainly is; then is he carrying on the good work, though it may seem to us as if it stood still, or as if it were never begun. Nay, he is attentive to it, such is his goodness! even amidst all that languor and indifference which sometimes seize on the Christian and disgrace his profession. For though, at such a time, religion may be said to be on the decline, and we are ourselves chargeable with great ingratitude and folly; yet God can and will over-rule all that bitterness and sorrow, which are the fruit of such criminal neglects, to the great purpose of reviving again the dying interests of godliness in our hearts. And it is both instructive and
pleasing

pleasing to reflect, how admirably he hath in many cases directed the dispensations of his providence, and the influences of his grace, to this truly important end.

These instances however excepted, their progress in the divine life is obvious to Christians themselves, or at least to every attentive observer of their temper and conduct. As they advance in their profession, they usually improve in knowledge purity and comfort. They have juster conceptions of divine truths, and are more thoroughly confirmed in their belief of them. Their aversion to sin and love of holiness increase. Their discouraging fears subside, and they become more satisfied as to their state towards God. And the effects of such improvement appear in the course of their lives. Amidst the cultivations of providence and grace, they grow and bring forth fruit. They *add to their faith, virtue; to virtue, knowledge; to knowledge, temperance; to temperance, patience; to patience, godliness; to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity*^a. Such, I say, is the fact with respect to many Christians. So that they who in the beginning were feeble, become *as David*; and they who are of

^a 2 Pet. i. 5, 6, 7.

the house of David, as the angel of the Lord^b. This gradual progress of religion in the heart is described in scripture by a great variety of figures, taken from the springing of the vegetable creation, from the growth of children, and from the improvement of scholars under the tuition of their masters. To this purpose we are assured, That they who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength, shall mount up with wings as eagles, shall run and not be weary, and walk and not faint^c: That they who are planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God; that they shall bring forth fruit in old age^d: and, in a word, That the path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day^e. — Which leads me to the last and principal thing to be considered, and that is,

6. That this work shall be brought to perfection at the day of Jesus Christ.

By the day of Christ in the New Testament is most commonly intended the last great day, when Christ shall come to judge the world; and which the apostle in another place emphatically styles, *That day^f*.

^b Zech. xii. 8.

^c Isa. xl. 31.

^d Psal. xcii. 13, 14.

^e Prov. iv. 18.

^f 2 Tim. i. 12. ἐκείνη τὴν ἡμέραν.

And

And it will be a glorious and a tremendous day indeed! a day distinguished by events of the most interesting nature, and in which every individual of the human race will be intimately concerned. On the morning of that day the great archangel shall sound his trumpet, the dead shall arise, the Son of God shall appear in the heavens with a radiance surpassing the sun, myriads of blessed spirits shall attend his descent, the throne shall be set, small and great shall stand before it, and each having received his final doom, the world and all that is therein shall pass away and be no more. How solemn, and to the righteous how joyful a scene this! — Now, though this is not the day to which the apostle seems here to refer; because the work which God hath begun *in us* is a work which respects the soul, and which will therefore, as there is an intermediate state, be perfected at death: though, I say, this is not the day here intended, yet an event will then take place in which the happiness of the Christian is nearly concerned, and which therefore I cannot forbear mentioning; I mean the change that will pass upon the body, by which it will be fitted for the reception of the immortal spirit. A work this which
will

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will exhibit to our admiring eyes a most amazing display of divine skill and power. *Christ the Saviour*, says the apostle, *shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself^e.*

But it is the day of the Christian's death, as I said, that seems to be here intended. And that may very properly be called *the day of Christ*, because Christ, to use his own words, then *comes to receive his people to himself, that where he is there they may be also^h.* When the union between soul and body is dissolved, the spirit returns to him who gave it, and joins the society of the blessed. Now, at that happy moment, God will of his mercy *finish, accomplish or perfect* this good work of which I have been discoursing, as the word here used is elsewhere renderedⁱ. He who began it will then put the last hand to it: he will bring forth the head-stone with shoutings, crying, *Grace, grace, unto it^k.* So the apostle speaks of *the spirits of just men being made perfect^l.*

^e Philip. iii. 21. ^h John xiv. 3. ⁱ ἐπιτελέσει. 2 Cor. vii. 6. Heb. ix. 6. ^k Zech. iv. 7. ^l Heb. xii. 23.

Glory is the consummation of grace, or religion in its most improved and perfect state. An idea this of the happiness of heaven, the most clear and satisfactory perhaps of any we can frame of it in the present life. For however difficult it may be to conceive of the manner of our existence in that world, and of the external circumstances that will contribute to our felicity, not having powers equal to the investigation of subjects so sublime and exalted; yet we can pretty easily, in our imagination, divest religion of the manifest imperfections which attend it in the present state: which done, we view it in its native splendor and glory, and so as it is possessed and enjoyed above. Now these imperfections are such as result from ignorance and error, impurity and sin, and of consequence inquietude and sorrow: but at death they shall all be done away. At the instant this day of Christ commences, the thick mists of pestilential darkness, which just now enveloped the soul, and rendered it both unhealthy and unhappy, shall be dissipated and scattered; and the sun of righteousness shall pour into it pure and unutterable light bliss and glory. *Now, we know only in part, and see through a glass darkly: nor can it be otherwise at present,*

present, our intellects are so weak, there are so many obstructions to the right exercise of them, and the means of their information are so limited and imperfect. But *then, we shall see face to face, and know even as we are known^m*; behold divine truths in their just and proper light, and without the least mixture of weakness or error, of doubt or uncertainty. Now, strong as the propensities of the heart may be to rectitude and holiness, they are continually thwarted and opposed by irregular inclinations and passions. But then, the full bias of the soul shall be to that which is good; nor shall it ever be warped or turned aside from its proper object, either by a principle of sin within, or by any kind of undue influence or temptation from without. Now, fear disquietude and misery are the effects of ignorance error and guilt. But then, the immortal spirit, irradiated with divine light and knowledge, and refined from all the impure dregs of sense and sin, shall enjoy the purest satisfactions and the most ravishing pleasures — pleasures resulting from a full consciousness of the favor of God, and uninterrupted communion with the great Author of all excellence and perfection.

^m 1 Cor. xiii. 9, 12.

Thus shall this *good work* begun in humiliation and sorrow, and carried on amidst great temptation and opposition, be at length finally completed in heaven. Thus shall this building, once in ruins, be restored to its ancient state, yea to a far greater degree of beauty and glory than ever. And O! who can describe the effect which this amazing display of divine skill and power shall have on the eye of every beholder? — the joy they will all feel at the dedication of this new temple? — and the transports of devotion and praise with which they will welcome the blessed God into it? *Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in*ⁿ. So shall the King of glory come in, fill the house with the brightest beams of benignity and grace, and never, never more depart thence.

Thus have we seen what that important matter is of which we may be assured concerning the Christian, *That God will perform the good work begun in him, until the day of Jesus Christ*. And now I should go on to consider the grounds of our confidence upon this matter. But in the mean

ⁿ Psal. xxiv. 7.

time it will be proper to bring home what hath been said to ourselves, by seriously inquiring whether God hath begun this good work in our hearts.

This is a question, Sirs, of infinite importance. For, if our depraved nature is not in a degree renewed in the present life, we have no authority either from reason or scripture to expect, that it shall attain to that perfection of happiness and glory I have been describing, in the future. Nay we are assured by him who cannot lie, *That except a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*°. And then, a right knowledge of the state of our souls is of the utmost consequence, on the one hand to prevent a most fatal and dangerous disappointment at last; and on the other to secure us, if we are Christians, from those discouraging fears which not only tend to make us unhappy, but to obstruct our improvement in the divine life. Let us therefore examine ourselves with great seriousness and impartiality; and at the same time with all that tenderness and charity, which both the word of God, and the unavoidable imperfection of the present state, abundantly warrant.

° John iii. 3.

If then this good work is begun in us, it will be the main object of our attention. Such is its importance, and so immediately does it affect the mind and heart, that it is not conceivable how it should have any existence in that man, who is little if at all thoughtful and solicitous about it. On the contrary, if we have a lively sense of its infinite utility and indispensable necessity; if we clearly give it the preference to any other concern whatever; if we are above all things anxious, lest we should be deceived in the opinion we form of ourselves; and if, in a word, our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows, our pleasures and pains, are chiefly affected by this important question, Whether we are interested in the favor of God and bear any resemblance to his image? it may from hence be fairly concluded that this work is begun in us.

We shall be sensible also, in this case, of the difficulties that attend it. Too many there are who look upon religion as a very easy attainment, and taking it for granted that it is in their power, at any time, and upon the shortest notice, to make their peace with God and prepare for heaven, they trouble themselves very little for the present about their souls and a future world.

But if we have entered into the spirit of divine things, we shall form very different conceptions of the matter. It will strike us as a most arduous as well as important concern: nay it is possible that the obstructions it may have met with in our breasts from numerous and powerful corruptions and from various and mighty temptations, may have led us sometimes to fear that though it is a most desirable blessing, yet it is scarcely attainable. A deep and affecting sense, however, of these difficulties, arising thus from an intimate acquaintance with our own hearts, furnishes a clear proof that this work is begun in us.

And then, as a lively apprehension of these difficulties will naturally put us upon looking for superior assistance; so a serious and affectionate regard to the Holy Spirit as the author of this work, is a farther evidence of its existence. *There is no man, saith our Saviour, who shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me^p.* In like manner it may be affirmed, that no man whose heart is renewed by a divine influence, can speak lightly of that influence. Whilst therefore a contemptuous treatment of the Holy Spirit, and indeed a total in-

^p Mark ix. 39.

difference to his gracious operations, afford a sad proof that men are utter strangers to the power of religion; the reverse may be reasonably concluded of all those, who not only give firm credit to this leading doctrine of divine revelation, but are deeply sensible of its utility and importance, and make it their frequent and earnest request to Heaven that they may experience these influences.

Again, as Christ is the foundation on which this building is raised, the corner stone on which the hope of the good man entirely rests; and as faith in him is a powerful and indeed only effectual mean of uniting us to God, and quickening us to obedience: so a suitable regard to the person doctrine and grace of this Almighty Saviour, is another plain and natural criterion of the reality and prevalence of religion in our hearts. *To you that believe,* says the apostle Peter, *he is precious*⁹. And the apostle John mentions *our confessing that Jesus is the Son of God* (a phrase which imports our confidence in him and ready consent to the gracious proposals of salvation by him) as a proof that *God dwelleth in us, and we in God*^r.

⁹ 1 Pet. i. 2, 7. ^r 1 John iv. 15.

He in whom this work is begun will also be fearful of every thing which hath, in his apprehension, a tendency to prevent its progress. A temper this of which Christians usually give very striking proofs in the early part of their profession. Next to the direct indulgence of sin, there is nothing which has a more natural effect to weaken the vital powers of religion, than a heedless desultory behaviour, a wanton conformity to the manners of the world, and an unnecessary connection with vain and wicked men. Tendernefs therefore of conscience, a quick sensibility to the first approaches of temptation, and a dread of grieving the Holy Spirit, are noble proofs of the reality of internal religion.

As is also a serious attention to those means by which this work is usually begun and carried on. He who is alive towards God, will have his ear open to receive instruction from the voice of Providence and the ministry of the word: nor can he live in the utter neglect of the several private and social duties of worship, no nor content himself with the mere formal discharge of such duties without entering into the spirit of them.

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He will also feel an affection for those in whom he believes this work is wrought, esteeming them the excellent of the earth, and accounting them brethren in Christ and fellow-heirs of eternal life. Nor can he be wholly destitute of a concern for others, especially his friends and relations, that they may be partakers with him of the infinitely rich and invaluable gifts of divine grace. — In fine, he will give proof of the genuineness of his religion in his life and conversation, the general course of which, allowing for the unavoidable imperfections of the present state, will be honourable useful and exemplary.

And now, is this good work begun in you, Christian? Let me congratulate you on your unspeakable felicity; and earnestly exhort you to be thankful to the great Author of it, to express your gratitude by labouring heartily with him in the work, and to comfort yourself with the assurance in the text, that he will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. — Are you still doubtful about it? Let me exhort you to add prayer to self-examination, and most fervently to beseech God to give you a right understanding of the state of your soul, that you may not on the one hand perplex yourself

with unreasonable and groundless fears, nor on the other flatter yourself with vain and presumptuous hopes. — But, is it a clear point that you have hitherto been an utter stranger to real vital practical religion? Let me in one word express the pity I feel for you in this your miserable state, and my earnest wishes that sensible of your danger, you may flee from the wrath that is to come, lay hold on eternal life, and become a happy partaker of all the rich pleasures of religion here, and of the unutterable joys with which it shall be crowned hereafter.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE XV.

PART II.

THE import of the text, *That God will perform the good work he hath begun in the Christian until the day of Jesus Christ*; hath been considered. And I come now,

II. To lay before you the grounds of our *confidence* respecting this matter; or, in other words, the principles whence it may be certainly concluded, that religion, if it be genuine, shall prevail over all opposition, till at length it is perfected in eternal glory. — “If it be genuine,” I say, because it is real religion only that is the subject of our present consideration, and not the mere semblance or external profession of it. — And I add, “that it shall prevail over all opposition,” because it does meet with

with opposition in the best of men, and of consequence sometimes assumes an appearance very unpromising, and which threatens its final dissolution.

Now the question thus stated is highly interesting and important, as the very earnest and emphatical manner in which the apostle expresses himself clearly intimates — Being confident, says he, of *this very thing*^{*}. And it is capable of such proof as will warrant a firm persuasion of it. For if it be admitted (and I think the plain and obvious sense of the words requires it) that the apostle's confidence did not arise merely from some private assurance he might have received from Heaven respecting the Philippians, but from the nature of the work itself, and the divine influence in it; it follows that his reasoning is equally applicable to all real Christians, of whom it may likewise be affirmed that God hath begun a good work in them. And it is remarkable that he adds in the next verse, *Even as it is meet for me to think[†] this of you all*.

This view therefore of the matter will naturally lead us into these two inquiries,

^{*} εὐτό τῆς. [†] φρονεῖν hinc dicitur non de animi affectu, sed de mentis judicio. BEZA.

I. How far it may be presumed from the nature of religion itself, that it is an abiding principle? And,

II. Which is the main consideration, What grounds we have to conclude, that God will exert his influence for the preservation of it?

There is some analogy between this argument and that of the immortality of the soul. From the nature of the soul, which is spiritual, and, so far as we can discover, hath no seeds or principles of dissolution in it like the body; it should seem to have been designed for eternal duration. Yet, as no creature is independent of the Creator, it is evident that the continuation of its existence must be the result of the will and influence of the first great cause of all things. Since therefore the light of nature could afford no positive proof of the immortality of the soul, there was great need of a revelation from God to decide the question; which accordingly scripture hath done. In like manner, it should seem highly probable from the nature of religion, that it is an abiding principle, or such a qualification or endowment of the mind as will
never

never be entirely annihilated and lost. Yet, as its preservation depends upon a continued exertion of that energy which first gave it existence, we must have recourse to the word of God for that assurance respecting this matter which its importance requires. — Let us then begin,

I. With inquiring, How far it may be presumed from the nature of religion itself, that it is an abiding principle?

Now if religion consisted only in faint and general speculations of the mind, which have at best but a casual and transient influence on a man's temper and conduct; it were not to be wondered that its continuance should be doubtful and precarious. We see things at one time in a very different light we do at another. Our passions are variously moved and affected. And of consequence our actions, thus guided and influenced, are inconstant and irregular. But in that heart which is really renewed by the grace of God, there is a steady belief of the great leading truths of religion, a deep sense of their importance, a fixed abhorrence of all sin, a prevailing desire to please God, and an habitual preference of the

the comforts and hopes, which spring from the divine favor, to any other enjoyments whatever. Now, is it probable, this being the state of the mind, that there should ever be a total revolution in it? Such a revolution, as that from a full assurance of the plainest truths, a man should degenerate into downright scepticism or infidelity? from a deep and weighty conviction of the vast importance of his everlasting interests, he should come to consider them of very trifling consequence? from an ardent concern to approve himself to God, he should not only sink into sloth and indifference, but be filled with bitterness and enmity against that great and good Being? and in fine, that instead of retaining the relish and favor he once had for the pure and substantial pleasures of religion, he should contract an utter antipathy to them? Is this I say probable?

It is easy to see how the faith of a Christian may be shook by the sudden assaults of temptation, and by unexpected and surprising events of life; but how the very seeds of it should be totally eradicated and destroyed, is hard to imagine. It is easy to see how the cares of the world may operate to divert his attention for a while from the great objects of religion; but how that
deep

deep impression of their importance, which had penetrated his very heart, should be entirely effaced, is very difficult to be apprehended. It is easy to see how sin by assuming false appearances may surprise and captivate the good man; but how he should quietly yield to the oppression of a tyrant he hath so much abhorred and dreaded, is most unaccountable. The lively and vigorous acts of love to God, may also through various causes be suspended; but how is it imaginable that a heart impregnated with this divine principle, should be susceptible of, or at least be inclined to admit, malevolent and traiterous sentiments and affections towards that most lovely of all Beings — such dispositions as constitute the characters of ungodly men? Nor is it scarcely a supposable case, that he who has tasted the refined pleasures of communion with God and the hope of a better world, should deliberately and with the full consent of his mind, renounce them all for the perishing enjoyments of time and sense.

The matter may be illustrated by instances somewhat similar. Taste and genius, natural temper, early prejudices, and vicious habits, are rarely altered, and never without the greatest difficulty overcome: so
that

that with respect to these things, most men carry the same complexion with them all through life: What they were in the beginning they in the main continue to be to the last. We should look upon it as a strange phenomenon, to see one who had discovered an early thirst of knowledge, become averse to intellectual improvements — a man of a sweet easy natural temper, become morose and obstinate — or he who had been remarkable for his simplicity and integrity, become crafty and fraudulent. How improbable is it then that religion, which if it be genuine must have taken fast hold on the heart and mingled itself with the vital principles of the soul, should be torn thence by surrounding temptations, or fall an entire sacrifice to opposing passions and corruptions? The Heathens themselves entered so far into the spirit of this reasoning, respecting the habits of virtue and morality, that we sometimes hear them making their boast of their philosophers and great men, that you might as soon divert the sun from his course, as turn them from the practice of truth and righteousness.

But if we farther consider, to what the operations of religion do in their own nature

ture tend, or the respect they have to some future attainment, or state of perfection; it should from thence also seem that it is an abiding principle. We cannot think of *seed* sown in the ground, without annexing the idea of its expanding, springing up, and at length arriving to maturity, and producing its own proper fruit. The idea of *childhood* hath a manifest relation to manhood; so that, according to the common course of things, it is expected an infant will grow to the stature of a man, and that reason will gradually improve and strengthen, till it ripens into that state in which it usually appears at full age. A *work begun* is a relative phrase, and hath no meaning in it, if not considered in reference to that perfection which was originally designed and planned. Now, though in each of these instances it is possible the end may not be attained, — the seed may perish in the ground — the child may die in its infancy — and the work may not be finished; yet such events are unnatural, and to be ascribed rather to some positive external influence, than to any immediate tendency in the things themselves to dissolution. In like manner, may it not be reasonably presumed from the nature of religion, which is frequently

frequently thus described, that it will abide till it arrive at a state of perfection in eternal glory? To this state its principles powers and operations manifestly tend: so that if it were really dissolved and lost, its proper end would not be attained; nor could this happen, but from some force superior to that which it hath in itself. And in such case it might be said of it, as of the death of an infant or a young plant, that its dissolution was untimely and unnatural. As to the question, What ground we have to conclude that no such external force shall prevail to its total destruction? *that* will come to be considered afterwards.

In the mean while let me observe, that this high probability, arising from the nature of religion, that it is an abiding principle; is confirmed by correspondent descriptions given us of it in scripture. And indeed these descriptions of it are so full and clear, that I think the certainty of its continuance may from them be fairly proved. — The Christian is said *to have eternal life*^a, which may be well explained not only of his being intitled to future happiness, but of his having the seeds of the divine life in him; since it is

^a John iii. 36.

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elsewhere declared that *he hath eternal life abiding in him, and that he dwelleth in God, and God in him*^w. And what words can more fully and strongly express the truth I have been establishing? Religion is a *living* principle; that principle is in its own nature *eternal*; and it *abideth, dwelleth, continueth* in him who hath it. — Our Saviour not only speaks of it as *living water*, but assures us, that *this water shall be in him to whom he gives it, a well of water springing up into everlasting life*^x. The well may be deep, and difficult to be come at; nay it may for a while be stopped up, covered with earth, and the surface of it so disguised as that it can hardly be known where it is: yet the spring abides, and hath such force in it as again to work its way through every obstruction, till at length it rises into everlasting life^y. — This notion of religion is also farther confirmed by what our Saviour says of the effect, which the water of life produces in those who drink it. *They shall never thirst*^z; that is, it shall so far subdue their eager desire of earthly things, as that *that* desire shall no more be the ruling predominant passion in their breasts. — With

^w 1 John iii. 15. Chap. iv. 16. ^x John iv. 14.
^y Shaw's Emmanuel. ^z John iv. 14.

this account of the matter agrees likewise the metaphorical language of the apostle John, who describes it as *the anointing which Christians have received of God*^a. He alludes to the ancient ceremony of unction, used at the inauguration of kings and priests; and which was designed to express not only their investiture with those offices, but their qualifications for them by the descent of the Spirit upon them. In like manner, the grace of God is that holy oil, that rich perfume poured upon Christians, by which they are not only devoted to, but prepared and qualified for the duties of their sacred profession. And this anointing *abideth in them*; it so mingles itself with the powers and affections of the soul, as that the fragrant odor is never to be wholly dissipated and lost. — To which I will add, that as the Christian is said to be born of God, so we are assured that *his seed remaineth in him*^b; which is clearly to be understood of that new nature spirit and temper communicated to him, and which however it may sometimes be enfeebled and weakened, yet retains such force and energy in it as to prevent his *committing sin*, that is, gross sins, or however his perpe-

^a 1 John ii. 27.

^b 1 John iii. 9.

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trating them with deliberation and consent, and for a continuance, as is the character and practice of wicked men.

And now from the nature of religion, as it thus stands described in scripture, we may I think with confidence presume that it is an abiding principle. And so I am led to inquire,

II. What grounds we have to conclude that God will exert his influence for the preserving and bringing it to perfection?

Here you see the question is changed from the natural incorruptibility of religion to the care that God will take of it. For it is a possible thing that *that* which is in its own nature immortal, I mean, hath not in itself any seed or principle of dissolution, may yet be destroyed by some superior external force; and that *that* which is capable of a farther degree of perfection, may through the want of an external concurring influence, fail of the end for which it was formed. The soul, for instance, having no principle of corruption in itself like the body, may be said to be naturally immortal: yet surely that almighty power which created the soul, or any power superior

rior to it if God permit, may put an end to its existence. And so the seed sown in the ground, though it hath in it the stamina or first principles of all that perfection proper to its particular species; yet if the heat and moisture which the sun and rain afford, are withheld, it will remain in its present state, and not attain to that maturity, with a view to which it was originally created. In the same manner we may reason as to religion. Though it is in its own proper nature incorruptible, it being the seed or beginning of eternal life; yet it is not independent of God, and therefore if he withdraws his support and influence, it may, it will be overpowered and destroyed by temptation and sin. And though it is capable of higher and nobler attainments, and naturally aspires to them; yet, if the necessary means of such attainments are withheld, it can never arrive to its proper state of maturity. From whence it follows, that *that* divine energy which first gave it existence must be farther exerted, in order to its preservation and final perfection. And indeed the necessity of this is evidently implied in those passages, which speak of Christians being *kept by the power of God through faith*

unto salvation^c; and of their being made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light^d.

Let us then inquire, What ground we have to expect that such an influence will be exerted in favor of the real Christian? — The real Christian, I say, because the inquiry respects him only, and not the mere nominal professor. ~~Now~~ the matter may I think be rested upon the two plain arguments the text suggests, and which therefore we will briefly consider — That God hath begun a good work in the Christian, and therefore will finish it — And that he hath expressly promised he will finish it; for what here follows in the way of an inference or conclusion, may be considered as a positive declaration of his gracious intention respecting this matter, and hath the concurrent support of many other promises of the like import.

FIRST. God hath begun a good work in the Christian, and therefore it may be naturally concluded he will finish it.

So we commonly reason in regard of the conduct of men, and upon affairs of very

^c 1 Pet. i. 5.

^d Col. i. 12.

trifling consequence in comparison with that of which we are here discoursing. If I see a large and fair building rising into existence, as I shall not doubt that there is some one who has laid the plan and undertaken to execute it; so from the character of the architect, from the extensiveness of the plan, from the expence he hath been at to provide materials for the work, and in fine from his having begun it, and made some progress in it, I shall certainly infer that he will by and by bring it to perfection. For, as our Lord says, *Which of you intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold him begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish*^c. How very incredible is it then, that the blessed God should frame a design of such infinite utility and importance, as that of recovering sinners from their apostacy, and preparing them for the fruition of himself in heaven; that he should, at so vast an expence, provide the necessary means to this great end; that through the in-

^c Luke xiv. 28, 29, 30.

fluence of his grace these means should take effect upon their hearts, and the outlines of their future perfect character should appear in their tempers and lives; and yet that he should after all withhold such farther degrees of grace, as are requisite to secure them from the violence of sin and temptation, and to bring this good work which he had himself begun to the desired perfection?

God is we know infinitely wise and all-powerful. Wherefore we may be assured that whatever plan he lays it is adjusted in such a manner, and the execution of it receives such continual support from himself, that it cannot fail of taking effect. *He knoweth the end from the beginning*^f, and *worketh all things after the counsel of his own will*^g. — This great business of forming an immortal mind for the exalted duties and pleasures of religion here, and for a perfection of happiness and glory hereafter, is evidently the work of God, as hath been already shewn. — It is a work every way worthy of that great Being, and when completed will afford one of the most striking displays of his power and goodness. — Its importance far exceeds that of any

^f Isa. xlv. 10.^g Eph. i. 11.

other concern whatever; and the happiness not only of the good man himself, but of multitudes besides, is affected thereby. — Those in whom it is wrought are represented in scripture as the objects of the divine choice and affection, *a chosen generation, a peculiar people, such whom he hath formed for himself, and who love him, because he first loved them*^b. — And what deserves our particular consideration is, that the measures infinite Wisdom hath taken in order to open the way for this display of almighty power and goodness, are most expensive, and such as may naturally lead us to conclude that the event is the special object of his attention and regard. Let us in a few words enter into this last idea, though indeed it comprehends in it so many important truths, that it cannot be fully discussed here.

It is not merely by an act of the divine will that apostate men are recovered and saved. Something farther is necessary. The rights of God's law and government must be asserted and maintained, and provision made upon equitable considerations for the exertion of that influence, by which they who should be finally happy might be

^b 1 Pet. ii. 9. Isa. xliii. 21. 1 John iv. 19.

qualified

qualified for the participation of that happiness. To these ends the Son of God becomes incarnate, suffers the pains of death in their stead, arises from the dead, ascends up into heaven, and there ever lives to make intercession for them. So are they redeemed by his blood, accepted in him, and given to him as the reward of his sufferingsⁱ. And so is he constituted their living head, intrusted with all the rich blessings of grace designed to be bestowed upon them, and appointed the grand medium for the communication of the Holy Spirit, to whose influence this good work of which I have been discoursing is more immediately attributed^k.

And now, who that considers all these things, the plan laid in the counsels of Heaven for the redemption and salvation of sinners, the dignity of our Saviour's character, the value of his precious blood, the victory he hath obtained over the powers of darkness, the prevalency of his intercession, the authority he exercises over the universe, the special care and affection which he assures us he hath for all his faith-

ⁱ Acts xx. 28. 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. Eph. i. 6. Isa. liii. 10—12. ^k Eph. iv. 15, 16. Col. i. 18, 19. John i. 16. chap. xvi. 7. Tit. iii. 5, 6.

ful people, the influence which through his mediation is exerted for the renovation of their hearts, and the wise ordering all the affairs of life, even the minutest of them, so as best to contribute to their real welfare; who, I say, that duly weighs all these things but must join issue with the apostle in his conclusion, *That he who hath begun a good work in the Christian, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ?* — But it is yet farther to be remembered,

SECONDLY, That God hath expressly declared he will finish it; for what here follows in the way of an inference or conclusion, may be considered as a positive assurance of his gracious purpose and resolution.

The apostle was confident as to the Philippians, that God would complete what he had begun in them; and as he argued from the soundest principles, so he could not (especially as he was divinely inspired) be mistaken in his conclusion; his sentence must needs be decisive. Nor can it reasonably be doubted that what he affirms with respect to them, is equally applicable to all those whose characters are similar to theirs; that is, such who are *saints in Christ Jesus* — who

— who have *fellowship in the gospel* — whose love abounds in knowledge, and in all judgment, who approve the things that are excellent, are sincere — and bring forth the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God¹. Since therefore it is a general and positive assertion which concerns all real Christians, it may well be admitted as a ground of confidence with respect to such persons.

Here I might recite a great many passages of scripture which speak the same language with the text. But I shall confine myself to a few only, which if taken in their natural easy and plain intendment, cannot methinks fail of both illustrating and explaining the matter we have been considering. Not to insist therefore on those scriptures which declare the necessary connection between faith and salvation; as where our Saviour assures us, *That he who believes shall be saved, and shall never die*^m — Those which describe the natural progress of religion from its first rise to its final perfection; as where the wise man says, *The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day*ⁿ: and Job, *The righteous shall hold on his way,*

¹ Ver. 1, 5, 9, 10, 11. ^m Mark xvi. 16. John xi. 26.
ⁿ Prov. iv. 18.

and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger° — Those which speak of God's making an everlasting covenant with his people, not to turn away from them to do them good; and of his putting his fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from him^p. And those many other passages which assure us, That God knows them that are his, that he keeps them by his power through faith unto salvation, that they are preserved in Christ, and in a word, that his continued life mediation and intercession are the grounds of their hope of attaining to eternal happiness^q. — Not, I say, to insist on these scriptures, it will suffice briefly to illustrate a few others, which cannot methinks, without offering an unnatural violence to them, be understood in any other sense than that affixed to the text.

In that remarkable passage of the prophet Isaiah which foretels the gentleness of our Saviour's administration, and its prevalence notwithstanding over all opposition, there is such a description given of his kind and condescending regards to the weakest of his people, and to those in whom the first symptoms of real religion appear, as

° Job xvii. 9. ^p Jer. xxxii. 40. ^q 2 Tim. ii. 19.
1 Pet. i. 5. Jude 1. John xiv. 19. Heb. vii. 25.

strongly

strongly expresses his resolution to finish the good work where-ever his grace hath begun it. *A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory**. “ Be the condition of his faithful disciples ever so mean and despicable, or the discouragements they meet with in their Christian course ever so numerous and powerful; instead of rejecting and forsaking them, he will effectually support and strengthen them, till he make the cause of righteousness and truth completely victorious.” — When our Lord, in the character of a shepherd, would express his affection for the sheep, and his resolution to guard them from the assaults of Satan the devouring lion, and of every adversary who would deprive them of that *eternal life* he gives them; he solemnly declares, *They shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. And he adds, My Father who gave them me, is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand*†. So that the care and tenderness of Christ the Mediator, and the almighty power of his Father, who hath given them to him that he might redeem

* Matth. xii. 20.

† John x. 28, 29.

them with his blood, are united for their continual protection and final salvation. — To the same purpose the apostle speaks, when, having comforted the Romans and himself, amidst all their sufferings in the cause of religion, with the prospect of a certain and glorious victory through him that had loved them; he adds, *For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*. As if he had said, “ I may well
“ be allowed to triumph even in the midst
“ of the combat, since I am confident, that
“ neither the dread of death arrayed in all the
“ terrors that persecution can devise; nor the
“ desire of life excited by every imaginable
“ prospect of worldly wealth and pleasure;
“ nor the united opposition of infernal
“ spirits, whatever rank they may hold and
“ how furious soever their rage may be; nor
“ events present or future be they what they
“ may; nor the height of prosperity, nor the
“ depth of adversity; nor any other crea-
“ ture throughout the universe; shall be
“ able to separate any of us, who are Chris-

“ Rom. viii. 38, 39.

“ tians

“ tians indeed, from the love of God,
 “ which he hath given us in Christ Jesus,
 “ and which is so secured to us in him as
 “ that it shall never be lost.” — The general
 reflection also which the apostle John makes
 upon the apostacy of some in those early
 times, who pretended they were Christians
 when they really were not such; falls in clear-
 ly with the point we have been establishing:
If they had been of us, they would no doubt have
continued with us *. “ If with us they had
 “ entered into the spirit of the gospel, and
 “ felt the inward power of it upon their
 “ hearts, they would doubtless have still
 “ adhered to us. Their views being sin-
 “ cere and upright, they would have seen
 “ no cause to forsake us, and the grace of
 “ God would have secured them from the
 “ temptations to which they stood exposed.
 “ It hath however so happened, *that they*
 “ *might be made manifest* what they really are,
 “ and that their fall might prove a warning
 “ to others; *because* hereby it appears that
 “ *not all* who are with us in the profession
 “ of the gospel are indeed of *our* number
 “ as true and genuine Christians. *But ye*
 “ *have an unction from the Holy One, and*
 “ ye know all things; that is, Ye have
 “ such an anointing of the Holy Spirit,

* 1 John ii. 19, 20.

“ and

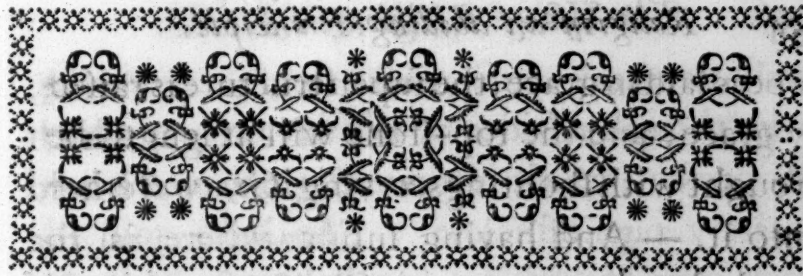
“and such an experimental acquaintance
“with all the essential truths of Christiani-
“ty, as will effectually prevent your fall-
“ing into those snares, which have proved
“fatal to these unhappy apostates.” — Nor
can I forget to mention the remarkable pro-
mise made originally to Joshua, and which
most certainly belongs to all the people of
God, as appears from the manner of its ap-
plication in the epistle to the Hebrews; *I*
will not, I will not leave thee, I will never,
never, never forsake thee: for such is the
emphasis of the original^r. Language this
which conveys a strong idea of the immuta-
bility of the divine love; and as it is de-
signed to encourage our confidence in God’s
readiness to assist us on all occasions, and
amidst the greatest difficulties and tempta-
tions, so adds no small weight to the gene-
ral argument.

On these considerations then may we rest
our firm persuasion, *That God will perform*
the good work he hath begun in every real
Christian.

And now to close the whole. Let me re-
mind you, Christians, of your infinite obli-
gations to the grace of God. You cannot be
enough thankful. The foundation of your

^r Heb. xiii. 5. *Οὐ μή σε ἀρῶ, καὶ ἡ μή σε ἐγκαταλίπω.*

hope is laid in grace; the superstructure is raised by grace; and the top-stone will at length be brought with shoutings, crying, Grace, Grace unto it. — And having substantial reason to conclude that you are Christians indeed, if what hath been said is true, you have surely all imaginable cause for chearfulness and joy, as well as gratitude and praise. — Nor will this doctrine, if rightly understood, prove an occasion of sloth and indifference to an ingenuous mind: on the contrary, instead of relaxing, it will strengthen the nerves of the soul, and mightily quicken and invigorate the Christian in his course of duty. — And as to those who are disposed to turn the grace of God into licentiousness, it is sufficient to observe, that the remotest expression of such a temper may justly authorise a strong presumption, that God hath not begun a good work in that man's heart; and that therefore the hopes with which such an one flatters himself are vain and groundless. But I am persuaded better things of you, brethren, and things which accompany salvation.



DISCOURSE XVI.

The Use of Religion in Death.

PART I.

PSALM xxiii. 4.

Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil: for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

O F the many arguments that may be urged in favor of religion, its usefulness in death is not the least. Nay this is an argument of such weighty consideration, that it might

well demand our most serious attention, even though all idea of the advantages which at present result from religion, were held intirely out of view. For where is the man who would not be glad to find himself in possession of something that will administer comfort to his heart, when all the resources of nature fail, and he is just upon the point of launching into an unknown and eternal world? Yea, there is scarce a man in the midst of life, be he ever so much intoxicated with its pleasures, who while his thoughts are by some circumstance turned upon death, doth not secretly envy the Christian of those hopes and joys which religion alone inspires. He may dislike religion itself, but to its utility at such a time his conscience cannot forbear yielding this testimony. Balaam was a wicked man, yet he spoke the sense of his heart when he said, *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his*². And if a glance only at death will force an acknowledgment of this sort from the lips of men of profligate lives, what advantage may we not hope will result from a steady contemplation of it? As such a realizing prospect of our final dissolution would not fail to

² Num. xxiii. 10.

plead

plead strongly in favor of the truth and importance of religion, so it is probable it would prove a powerful mean, with the blessing of God, of conciliating our hearts to that great event. With this view I propose now to discourse particularly of death. And how great will be my happiness, if while I am describing its terrors on the one hand, and that effectual antidote which the grace of God hath provided against those terrors on the other, I should be an instrument of winning one soul to the love and obedience of Christ!

To this subject the words of the text naturally lead me. David was a great and mighty prince: and it should seem from what follows in the next verse, that he was at this time in the height of worldly prosperity. But his prosperity did not, as is too often the case with us, banish death from his thoughts: No. He knew how to admit a contemplation of this sort amidst the most chearful scenes. Nay he knew how hereby to add beauty to a composure, which for sprightliness of imagination and softness of expression, as well as for the accuracy and justness with which he keeps up the figure, exceeds almost any other of the kind in the book of psalms.

The blessed God he introduces in the character of a shepherd, at once congratulating himself on the happiness he enjoyed under his pastoral care, and expressing his assured hope that he should still enjoy the divine bounty guidance and protection. *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake*^a. How soft, how soothing the description! The tenderness of the shepherd's heart we feel — the peaceful pleasures of the happy flock we enjoy. And thus is represented the care which a kind and merciful God vouchsafes to take of those who fear him, the constant provision he makes for their wants both temporal and spiritual, the reasonable measures he uses for their recovery when through temptation they go astray, and the skilful manner in which he leads and guides them in the ways of knowledge truth and holiness. But, as a farther proof of the shepherd's tenderness and love, and of the confidence which the flock securely repose in him, he changes the scene from green pastures and still waters to a dark and

^a Ver. 1, 2, 3.

gloomy

gloomy vale. *Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil: for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

Some are of opinion that by this striking image the psalmist means to describe, not death itself, but some affliction the terrors of which bear a near resemblance to it. And certain it is that there are afflictions, especially those on a religious account, which when they rise to their greatest height do equal, yea perhaps exceed the anguish felt in extreme moments. And David is frequently used to compare his sorrows to those of a dying man. But I see no necessity for departing from the first and obvious sense of the words. *The shadow of death* may without any kind of impropriety be understood of death itself. Nay it is thus used in several other passages of scripture, as particularly where Job speaking of the wicked says, *The morning is to them even as the shadow of death: if one knew them they are in the terrors of the shadow of death^b*; that is, they dread a discovery as men commonly dread death. And the phrase in the text might be ren-

^b Job xxiv. 17.

dered, *the valley of the deathly shade*. Considering the psalmist therefore as speaking here of death, we have in the words — The idea he framed of it, with all the terrors both real and imaginary which usually attend it — And the fortitude of mind he possessed in the view of it, with the grounds and reasons of that happy temper.

FIRST, His description of death is amazingly striking and expressive. He compares it, not to a gate through which a man instantly passes, but to a dark deep long dreary vale. A vale over which hang steep and craggy precipices, tremendous to be beheld, and which cast a long and horrible shade all through it. A vale in which the unhappy traveller is exposed to various and unknown dangers, where he is liable every moment to be swallowed up in pits of mire and water, or to be torn in pieces by beasts of prey. A vale in which his ear is assaulted with hoarse and dismal sounds, and his imagination overpowered with black and melancholy ideas. In a word, a vale tedious and long, and through which he walks with a slow and doubtful pace. So

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when

when the prophet Jeremiah speaks of the wilderness through which the Israelites passed, he describes it as *a land of deserts and of pits, a land of drought and of the shadow of death; and a land that no man had been used to pass through, and where no man dwelt*^a. And, as if the figure had been incapable of fully expressing his ideas, he introduces the king of terrors himself, that huge monster, as extending his shadow large and horrible all over this valley, and totally obstructing what little remaining gleams of light it might otherwise enjoy. And thus into his account of death he takes all the dismal appendages, all the sad solemnities of it. So that here is a combination of gloomy ideas, darkness and danger, solitariness and weariness, doubt and uncertainty, fear and horror, in short every thing that is terrible frightful and alarming. Such is his description of death. And now,

SECONDLY, What is his language, inspired as he was with the hopes and comforts of religion, in the view of this sad and solemn scene? *I will fear no evil: for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they*

^a Jer. ii. 6.

comfort me. Happy man! Who would not wish to possess his faith, his resolution?

I will fear no evil. Numerous and great are the evils, as we shall quickly see, to which death exposes mankind — evils which it is scarcely possible for humanity, much less for a guilty conscience to apprehend without dread. “ But be these evils what “ they may, I will not fear them. No. I “ will not, though at the same time I ac- “ knowledge myself a feeble helpless sheep, “ and as such prone to fear. They may “ startle, but they shall not confound me. “ They may at their first appearance sur- “ prise, but they shall not overcome me. “ I will not yield to fear, but confidently “ rely on my God. Though ten thou- “ sands of these evils set themselves against “ me I will not be afraid. No, I will not “ fear though the earth be removed, and “ though the mountains be carried into the “ midst of the sea.” And why?

Because thou art with me — “ Thou a “ skilful compassionate and faithful shep- “ herd, who well knowest the dangers “ which await the flock in this dreary val- “ ley; who tenderly pitiest them amidst “ their weakness and their fears; and art “ ever able to aid support and deliver them.

“ — Thou

“ — Thou who hast hitherto been *my* shepherd; hast guided and defended me all
“ my days; hast supplied my wants when
“ every resource of nature hath failed; and
“ restored my soul when on the brink of
“ miseries worse than death. — Thou art
“ *with me*. In the midst of this gloomy
“ vale I believe thee to be present. Here
“ I have thee immediately before my eye.
“ I feel, I enjoy thy comforting thine en-
“ livening presence. Therefore I will not,
“ I do not fear.” And good warrant had
he, hath every Christian, for such confidence. God himself says, *Fear thou not,*
for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for
I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea
I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee
with the right hand of my righteousness.*
And again, *When thou passest through the*
waters, I will be with thee; and through
the rivers they shall not overflow thee:
when thou walkest through the fire, thou
shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame
kindle upon thee†.

He adds — *Thy rod and thy staff they*
comfort me. The rod and the staff denote
the same thing, the pastoral care, of which

* Isa. xli. 10.

† Chap. xliii. 2.

they are both the signs and the instruments. With the one and the other (for they are terms promiscuously used in scripture) the shepherd is said *to feed*^s his flock, and *to number* them^h. His crook he uses to guide them from field to field, to bring them back when they wander into by-paths, to remove obstructions out of their way, and to drive off beasts of prey when they would scatter worry or devour them. And by such figures doth he describe those divine influences, by which he was well assured he should be sustained in his last moments. “Unfruitful as that valley may seem, he will there find pasture to feed me with. Dark and intricate as the way may be, with his staff he will point out the path for me, and prevent my falling into pits that would ingulph and swallow me up. And numerous as the evils temptations and fears may be that there assault me, with his rod he will drive them all away. Thus does my Shepherd, in these moments of distress and affliction, and when pity is the only aid the kindest friend can administer, sustain defend and comfort me.”

^s Micah vii. 14. Zech. xi. 7. ^h Lev. xxvii. 32.

If by the rod and staff here the psalmist designed to convey an idea of any special means of support and consolation afforded the Christian in these circumstances, it may very well be explained of the gospel, which he himself calls in another place *the rod of God's strength*¹. With the rich discoveries and the exceeding great and precious promises of the bible the spirits of the dying faint are sometimes revived, and his hopes wrought up to divine extasy and triumph. So that touched with the rod of the gentle Shepherd, whose chearing smiles he all the while beholds, his enraptured soul cries out with triumphant joy amid the gloomy horrors of this dark valley, *O death where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth me the victory through Jesus Christ my Lord*².

Thus have I briefly explained the striking description the psalmist gives us of death, and his fortitude in the prospect of it. And now from this subject I shall take occasion,

I. To enter into a more particular consideration of death, and of those many cir-

¹ Psalm cx. 2.

² 1 Cor. xv. 55, 56, 57.

cumstances which render the very apprehension of it awakening and terrible;

II. To lay before you the supports and comforts which religion is adapted to afford the Christian in this sad season; and then,

III. To improve the whole.

I. I am to attempt a more particular description of death.

Now in our account of death we shall include the preceding and consequent circumstances of it. For in this meditation we must not place ourselves at the end of the valley, but with the psalmist be content for a few minutes to go down into the dreary vale, yea to walk through it. And how reluctant soever we may be to a contemplation of this sort, there are the most weighty considerations to persuade us to it. Die we must by and by whether we will or not. And studiously to avoid the thought of it before hand argues an imbecillity of mind, to say the least of it, which is highly censurable upon the most generally acknowledged principles of wisdom and prudence. Besides, the folly of such a temper must needs be exceeding great, since a familiarity with death is one
very

very likely mean with the blessing of God to subdue the fear of it, and to prepare us for it. No apology therefore need be made for describing that which, though painful to be beheld even at a distance, will doubtless be infinitely more painful when it comes upon us, if not thus considered and realized before hand.

To suppose that death is an innocent harmless thing, is to contradict the common sense and feelings of mankind. And to consider it as the mere effect of our original frame and constitution, and not as a punishment likewise inflicted on us for our sins, is to contradict the express declarations of the bible. We all dread death: and a dread that is so universal can hardly be imagined to proceed intirely from groundless superstition. There are some indeed who affect to speak lightly of it: yet even these can scarce see the stroke given to a relation or a friend, especially if it be sudden, without shrinking back at the sight. Or if they have resolution enough to command their countenances and feelings on such an occasion; yet when it comes to their turn to die, they find I may venture to affirm an inward shuddering at the prospect, which must methinks convince them that that fear of it proceeds

ceeds from other causes than mere superstition. Let us therefore, by taking such a particular view of death as fact and observation furnish, enter into the several causes of that dread of it, which mankind thus universally feel. Here then we will consider it in two points of view, as a *natural*, and as a *moral* evil; that is, as it appears in the apprehension of *Nature* and of *Conscience*.

FIRST, How tremendous is death, even when we view it as a *natural* evil only, and separate from all considerations of a moral and religious kind! The usual forerunners of it, the stroke itself, and the consequents of it as to the body and this world, do each of them excite fear.

The usual forerunners of it, by which I mean sickness, and the other preceding accidental circumstances of dying. These are the heralds of the pale conqueror, who go before him to proclaim his approach. And their appearance is many times as tremendous, yea perhaps more so than that of the conqueror himself. The house must be shaken before it comes down: the forts assaulted before a breach is made: and the vessel tossed about with fierce winds, before the tempest tears it to pieces. Cir-

cumstances

cumstances these extremely alarming to those who are immediately concerned. In like manner the burning fever, the wasting consumption, the racking stone, and various other diseases, either secretly mine the foundation, or suddenly and furiously pull down the walls of these earthly houses. And how can such assaults upon the human frame be even distantly apprehended, much less actually endured, without exciting horror? "We groan being burdened," is not the language of old age only, but many times of early life; and always of a broken and declining constitution. And can we hear these groans, and not be affected with them? Can we stand by a sick bed, and see a friend languishing thereon, turning restless from side to side, counting impatiently the passing minutes, loathing every cordial offered him, and for days and weeks it may be dying, as Job expresses it, in the bitterness of his soul; can we I say be witnesses of all this, without feeling a chill on our blood and spirits? It is a sad scene: and the solemnity of the scene increases as death advances. Every step the last enemy takes alarms. Every fresh symptom strikes terror into spectators, and spreads silence and gloominess through the dwelling. The disease baffles the power

of medicine — They who stand by observe its progress — The dying man watches their looks — He suspects his case to be desperate — The physician at length pronounces it so — He believes it. Now the wheel of life goes down apace. The vital flame burns faint and irregular. Reason intermits. Short intervals of sense divide his thoughts and passions: now — himself is the object; then — his family. His friends, his relations, his children croud around his bed, shed their unavailing tears over him, and receive his last blessing. His pulse beats a surrender to the pale conqueror. — His eyes swim — His tongue falters — A cold sweat bedews his face — He groans — He expires. *Thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away* *. Can it be wondered that such scenes as these affect us? Or is it a virtue in any one to be a cool and unconcerned spectator of them? Thus are the preceding circumstances of death tremendous. And so is,

12. The stroke itself. Not having indeed felt it, we cannot frame adequate conceptions of it. Yet it must needs be painful and distressing, and so a just cause of fear. The friendship between soul and

* Job xiv. 20.

body is strong, like that between David and Jonathan. The connection is very intimate: it is the closest of all unions. It interests each party in the others pains and pleasures, and that in so sensible and instantaneous a manner as is truly astonishing. That therefore which dissolves the union cannot but be a violent shock to nature: and so it appears to be by the struggles which many endure in the article of death. The swellings of Jordan can scarcely be beheld without shivering, especially by him who stands at the brink of it, and is just launching into it. Indeed we know not, as I said, what it is to die: imagination therefore may unduly heighten the terror of dying. Yet, as this great change is a transgression of the original law of our existence, and hath evident symptoms of pain and anguish attending it, it would be unnatural not to dread it. It is the king of terrors, the first the chiefest the mightiest of all natural evils. And then again,

3. What follows, I mean in regard of this world, must needs make death yet farther distressing in the apprehension of humanity. It closes the present scene, that scene of action and enjoyment with which we have been sensibly conversant, and of which

alone we have any clear and adequate ideas. It dissolves, for ever dissolves, our connections with this world, its inhabitants businesses and pleasures. As to man, says Job, *his excellency then goes away^m. His thoughts*, says the psalmist, *his schemes purposes and resolutions as to the present life, in that very day perishⁿ*. He dieth, and he can *carry nothing away with him^o*. Considerations these which had their effect upon good Hezekiah himself, when in the view of death the reasonings of nature for a while overpowered the dictates of faith and religion — *I shall not see, said he, the Lord, even the Lord in the land of the living; I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world^p*. But how must these considerations aggravate the horrors of death in his apprehension whose heart is rivetted to the world, and who hath no future prospect to balance the loss of present enjoyments! And then the state in which the body is left, a pale cold inactive breathless corpse, and the deformed corrupted nauseous condition to which it is quickly reduced, add a farther terror to death. Whence we find that the very ensigns of

^m Job iv. 21.

ⁿ Psal. cxlvi. 4.

^o Psal. xlix. 17.

^p Isa. xxxviii. 18.

mortality, though in themselves of trifling consideration, I mean the shroud the coffin the mattock the grave, give a sudden chill to the spirits of unthinking persons. Now on all these accounts it is easily seen how death, considered as a natural evil only, of necessity excites fear. But the principal consideration is,

SECONDLY, The terror it occasions to the conscience through an apprehension and sense of guilt.

I shall not take up your time with proving particularly that sin is the cause of death, and that it is inflicted on mankind as the proper punishment of it. This might with good reason be suspected from the account we have given of the fact, since it is not conceivable that a just and good God would deal thus with his creatures, if they had not some how or other merited his displeasure. And scripture puts the matter beyond all dispute: *Death hath passed upon all men, for that all have sinned**. But my business rather is to describe the horror which a consciousness of guilt infuses into death. This is strongly expressed by the apostle when he describes *sin as the sting of death†*. And indeed so it is.

* Rom. v. 12.

† 1 Cor. xv. 56.

Hence the king of terrors derives his chief power to domineer tyrannize and triumph over mankind. This is that which gives his countenance the most deformed and revengeful aspect, and puts a rod of iron into his hands wherewith to scourge his miserable captives. The natural fortitude of which some men are possessed might enable them to subdue, in a degree at least, those causes of fear which were just now mentioned. But this, where it prevails, quickly pulls down the most stubborn spirits, and resists the force of all soothing considerations whatever, except those which religion affords. There are instances indeed of those whose consciences are so hardened, that to appearance they are little affected with this kind of dread in the view of death. But it might easily be proved, that the consciences of such men are in a diseased and unnatural state: so that though their stupidity may prevent some present painful sensations, it is not to be accounted an advantage to them, as it will but be an aggravation of their future misery. This however is far from being the case with the generality of mankind. Infinite numbers there are who, when they enter this dark valley, acknowledge that the principal horrors of it owe
their

their existence to a reflection on their past guilt. Conscience, though it hath long slept, usually awakes then: and loud, very loud and clamorous are its reproaches. How tremendous to have my sins, innumerable heinous aggravated repeated sins, brought up to my view, set in order before my eyes, and charged home upon my conscience; and all this at a time when I am languishing upon a bed of sickness, and broken with pain and sorrow! This surely must be distressing to the last degree; especially when the guilt which thus stares a man in the face, points not only to death as its proper punishment, but to consequences still more awful in the world to come.

Death must be dreadful even to the man who hath wrought himself up to a confident assurance, if that be possible, that there is no future state. For how can I think of being quickly annihilated, and having all my powers of action and enjoyment cut off, and for ever absorbed in silence darkness and death, without being wretchedly melancholy in the immediate prospect of such a thick and impenetrable gloom? The only force there is in such a consideration to alleviate the dread of dying, is the compa-

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relative pleasure arising from a hope of escaping what is worse than ceasing to exist. But such a confident assurance of annihilation is what I imagine few possess. We will suppose then the man to be totally in the dark about what is to come. His views of another world are broken confused and distracted. He is going he knows not whither. He is launching into a wide sea, without either compass or rudder to steer by. How must such a wandering fluctuating uncertain state of mind greatly heighten and exasperate his natural dread of death, which he sees to be inevitable!

But if we put the last and perhaps the most common case of all, where the conscience is alarmed, I mean the apprehension of a future judgment and the miseries of the damned; how exceedingly tremendous must be the appearance of the king of terrors, under these circumstances! — *Death on his pale horse, and hell following with him*^a! — The officer come to arrest the sinner, and bring him before the tribunal of a just and holy God, whence he is instantly to be sentenced to the abodes of darkness misery and despair! — Indeed the scene is almost too horrible to be paint-

^a Rev. vi. 8.

ed—The distant imagination of it is the shadow of death—What! O what then must be the reality!

And now this account of death, imperfect as it is, I have given you, in order to open the way to a prospect as chearful and enlivening, as that hath been sad and solemn. Who would not be glad, when he enters this dark and dreary vale, as we all shortly must, to possess the hopes and joys, and consequently the fortitude and resolution the psalmist expresses in the text?

DISCOURSE

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DISCOURSE XVI.

PART II.

FROM the view we have taken of death, and of those many circumstances which render the very apprehension of it awakening and terrible, I proceed,

II. To describe the supports and comforts which religion is adapted to afford the Christian in this awful, this trying season. Now in order to set its utility and importance at this time in a proper light we shall consider—The state in which death finds the real Christian—And the extraordinary aids and consolations which are then granted him.

FIRST, The state in which death finds the Christian, is such as gives him great advantage against most of those evils, which render this last event so very formidable.

I mean not by what I have here to say to raise the character of the good man above its proper standard, to divest him of infirmities and sins which are scarcely avoidable in the present life, or to describe him so mortified to the world and so elevated to heaven, as to be perfectly superior to the feelings and fears common to humanity. No. I am sensible the best of men are but men. Yet upon a sober review of the nature and tendency of religion, it will be found to have a force in it where it prevails to alleviate our fears of death, and in a degree at least to reconcile us to it. What is it that makes us afraid to die? It is, as you have seen, the pain of dying, and the miseries we apprehend will follow. And what is it that makes us, though we are not afraid of death, yet reluctant to it? It is an unwillingness to part with this world, and an unsuitableness of temper to another. Now, if the grace of God makes such a change in the state and temper of a man, as doth materially affect each of these causes both of *fear* and *reluctance*; its infinite utility and advantage at this time we shall clearly see and acknowledge.

First,

First, As to *dread* of death. Peace with God and a subjection of heart to his will, are surely the most effectual antidotes against each of those causes of it which were just now mentioned. For,

1. In regard of the disorders that usually precede death, and the pain itself of dying; What can fortify the breast against an undue dread of these evils like a sense of God's favor, and a meek submission of heart to his will? Natural courage indeed some men possess in a greater degree than others. And it is doubtless of no small use to them at such seasons. But it is a courage of very different consideration from that I am here speaking of. It is purely constitutional and mechanical; and so is little if at all owing to any prudent or rational considerations that suggest themselves to the mind. Wherefore the proper and usual expressions of it, are a wild kind of fierceness, or an unmeaning sort of stupidity. And then, as it depends wholly on the temperament of the blood and animal spirits, long and tedious illness is almost sure to subdue and conquer it. But the courage a man would wish to possess, when he is entering the valley of the shadow of death, is an even serene composed state of mind, accompanied with

a patient submission to the will of God. Now this temper religious principles and those only can inspire.

What is the true and proper character of a real Christian? He is a firm believer in the perfections providence and grace of God. To God he is reconciled by Jesus Christ, and as he hath a humble confidence in the divine mercy, so his heart is subjected to the divine authority, and his angry and tumultuous passions are softened and subdued. Now I ask, Is not the man of this character the fittest of all others to contend with the infirmities of nature and with death itself? To be afflicted doth not seem to such a man a strange or an unreasonable thing; much less is he prone to censure such dispensations as severe and unjust. "Can the judge of all the earth do wrong?" "Shall a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" He hath learned in his measure to bear the yoke, to deny himself, and to make account of pain and sorrow in time to come. And having been thus disciplined by the providence and grace of God, much of that impatience murmuring and fretfulness is prevented, which are not only very displeasing to God, but which tend to heighten and exasperate the anguish and

misery which attend bodily diseases: not to say here how religious considerations may be supposed to soothe and refresh the heart of such a man in those moments, when a suspension of violent pain enables him to think and reflect; and how his affliction may be abated, by his being thus in a better capacity than others to relish the mercies that are mingled with it. Religion then is adapted to divest death of its natural terrors, or at least to soften and assuage them. And how it precludes the other main cause of fear, I mean,

2. The sad apprehension of future miseries, will easily appear. This is the bitterest ingredient by far in this last cup given us to drink. The condition of the awakened desponding sinner in the immediate view of death and eternity, is dreadful beyond description. He possesses the sins of his youth and his riper years, secret and open, with the horrid aggravations of them. They stare him full in the face, and tell him loudly that he righteously deserves the wrath of God. These whips, these scorpions, lash his conscience, and make him a terrible spectacle to beholders. He would

draw a vail over what is past, but he cannot. He remembers the warnings which Providence, which his friends, which ministers, which his own conscience have again and again given him, and how he slighted opposed and despised them. These things he calls to mind, and they pierce him to the heart; while at the same time all hope of mercy is gone, and scenes of future misery croud upon his sight.

Now, the experience and practice of religion prevent in a great measure these painful reflections, and these agonizing prospects. For it is the happiness of the Christian to have escaped many of the evils which occasion such keen and pungent sensations. So that his conscience is not in the diseased and restless state of his we have been describing. And then, as to the many sins and corruptions he has to lament, they are for Christ's sake forgiven him, and he is freed from condemnation. So that he hath no real ground for those sad and distracting reflections which torture the wicked; nor can those objects of future terror which assault their imagination, be with truth presented to his. He may indeed question his interest in the favor of God, and doubt of his future happiness. But still there is a difference

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difference between the discouragements of a timorous Christian, whose animal spirits too are enfeebled by bodily disorder; and the anguish which he feels, who at this awful time is conscious to himself that he has lived in sin, and is an enemy to God and religion. And though God may, for a time, hide his face from the Christian, and permit Satan to buffet him with his temptations; yet for the most part the storm after a while subsides, and peace is restored to his breast.

Peace of conscience then in a reflection on what is past, and serenity of temper in the contemplation of what is to come, are, if I may so express it, the natural and proper state of his mind who is truly religious. So that if the health of the soul be not disordered, through any of the causes just hinted at; these effects of such health will appear as well at the close of life, as in the midst of it. And this is very commonly the case.

Mark the perfect man, behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace^{*}. He is not, it may be, transported with future hopes and prospects; yet, upon the faith of the gospel, and a serious review of his own state, he is well satisfied that it is all right

^{*} Psal. xxxvii. 37.

between

between God and him; and so he is calm and easy. An eternal world he sees immediately before him; yet he enjoys the quiet possession of himself. Of the importance of death he is sensible; yet he is not afraid to die. — How desirable is it in such a state as this to meet the last enemy! Can we be one moment at a loss to determine which is to be preferred, the pleasures of a peaceful, or the terrors of a self-condemning conscience? the dread of future wrath, or a chearful confidence in the divine mercy, through the atoning blood of Christ? The happiness is unspeakable to be able then to say, *“This is my rejoicing, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, I have had my conversation in the world”*: and though I am conscious of much guilt, and am utterly incapable of atoning it; yet *the blood of Jesus Christ hath cleansed away all my sins, and in him the beloved I am accepted*! Religion then is the noblest antidote against the dread of death.

But admitting that some men who are strangers to the grace of God, do yet through hardness of natural constitution feel little or no dread of death itself, and

* 2 Cor. i. 12.

† 1 John i. 7. Eph. i. 6.

through downright infidelity or at least inattention, are little afflicted with the apprehension of its consequences in the world to come; they are nevertheless on other accounts very unwilling to die. Now,

Secondly, As to this *reluctance* to death. The grace of God strikes at the main causes of it, I mean a criminal attachment to the present world, and a perfect unsuitableness of disposition to the heavenly state; and so, by correcting and subduing these tempers, it gives the Christian an advantage over death, in this view of it, above another man.

In regard of the present world, it loosens his attachment to it, and so makes the idea of parting with it less irksome and disagreeable.

The man who is destitute of real piety is a friend of the world. There is an habitual love of it prevailing in his heart. He walks by sight. He minds earthly things. Either the profits honors or pleasures of the present life are his main enjoyments. They are the idols he worships, and at the very apprehension of being stripped of them, he cries out with Micah, "They would take away my gods, and what have I more?"*

* Judges xviii. 24.

Now

Now to one of this character the thought of dying must be very sad indeed! He can look upon death in no other light than that of a fierce robber, who aims at spoiling him of his best and most valuable possessions.

But the reverse of this is the character of a man of religion. An estimate he has made of the world, and joined issue with Solomon in the sentence he pronounces upon it. He has looked around him upon this and the other delectable enjoyment, and with eagerness put the question, Is happiness, perfect happiness in you? So he hath said to wealth and power and honor, to the gratifications of sense, to improvements in human knowledge, to the sweets of friendship, and to the tender feelings of consanguinity and natural affection. And in the reply they each make he has readily acquiesced. Whatever comparative value therefore there may be in these enjoyments themselves, or however unduly his passions may be sometimes captivated with them; his judgment is fully convinced of their vain and unsatisfying nature, and his heart is by the grace of God rescued from the dominion they once had over him. *By the cross of Christ he is crucified to the*
C c 2 *world,*

world, and the world to him *. Now surely this indifference to the things of sense, which is unquestionably the natural and genuine fruit of true religion, must needs have a happy effect to abate, if not wholly overcome, a man's reluctance to death. He that hath little to expect from the present life, must feel less pain at the thought of parting with it, than another who has an extravagant and insatiable fondness for it, And then,

2. As to the world to come, the grace of God forms him into a temper suited to it.

We are very sure that the happiness of heaven must be pure and spiritual, and of a nature widely different from that which the generality of mankind covet and pursue. It must consist in a steady contemplation of the infinite glories of God; in a continual intercourse with holy beings, on subjects the most sublime and exalted; in exercises of pure and sinless devotion; and in unwearyed acts of chearful and uniform obedience. Now the very idea of this is so far from being agreeable to a carnal mind, that it is highly disgusting and irksome. And were a wicked man to be assured, that death would certainly remove him into

* Gal. vi. 14.

such a state, that assurance instead of reconciling him to the change, would rather make him averse to it. He wishes for that kind of heaven alone, which Mahomet promises his disciples.

Of indispensable importance therefore it is, to the overcoming that reluctance to death which arises from this consideration, to have the heart formed into an aptitude to the business and enjoyments of the other world. And such is the effect of the influence and operation of divine grace upon it. Where religion prevails, a preference will be given to the pleasures resulting from the favor of God, and the pure and spiritual exercises of the mind, to any other whatever. And though the best of men, by reason of the remains of imperfection and sin which still cleave to them, will endure many painful struggles within, and sometimes suffer a sad suspension of their noblest comforts; yet the hope of being freed from sin, and enjoying such a kind of heaven as I have been describing, will afford them solid satisfaction. And it is easy to see that this being their habitual temper, they are better prepared for this great change than other men. That which the sinner would ac-

count a great infelicity, is in the apprehension of the good man the highest bliss.

Thus it appears then that the state in which death finds the real Christian, gives him an advantage against most of those evils, which render the apprehension of it formidable. Whence the utility of religion at this most important juncture is clearly evinced. And now,

SECONDLY, Let us take a view of those extraordinary supports and consolations, which it pleases God to afford some Christians in their last moments. And here,

I. It is remarkable that many persons do at this time enjoy an unusual flow of animal spirits.

How this is I will not pretend to say; whether it may be accounted for on physical principles, or is to be attributed to the immediate influence of an all-wise and good Providence. It is possible that the violent struggles of nature, when the constitution is just breaking up, may give an extraordinary force and energy to the animal spirits; like a candle, which when it is nigh being extinguished, will suddenly recover itself, and shoot out its light with unusual brightness towards the last. This is very observable

able in some disorders; and being no other than a mere effort of nature, is common to bad as well as good men. But the effect, in some instances, so far exceeds the force of any natural apparent cause, that we may with good reason impute it to the particular favor of Divine Providence. And this, I doubt not, they who have stood by the dying beds of Christians have observed with peculiar pleasure. Some of them, and those too who when in health were of a different complexion, have happily enjoyed a clearness of perception, a liveliness of imagination, and a strength and vigor of spirits which have been truly astonishing. I say not that this is the case of all. But so it is in some instances. And I know no reason why it should not be ascribed to a special and extraordinary influence exerted upon the animal frame. But be this as it may, it is certain,

2. That their minds are often composed, and their hearts sustained, by a seasonable reflection on the great truths of religion.

These are at all times, if properly applied, the noblest cordials that can be administered to the afflicted breast: but they are never so salutary as on these occasions, when it is out of the power of any worldly considerations

derations to afford relief. How soft and pleasing that idea of the blessed God which the gospel suggests, as laying aside all the terrors of avenging justice, and assuming for Christ's sake the endearing characters of a friend and parent! How enlivening the consideration of that *everlasting covenant* he has made with his people, *ordered in all things and sure!* * How reviving the many exceeding great and precious promises of his word, that *he will never leave nor forsake them* †; that *when they pass through the fire he will be with them, and through the waters they shall not overflow them* ‡; and that *when flesh and heart fail them, he will be the strength of their heart and their portion for ever* §! How soothing in a word the reflection, that *as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, the Son of God also took part of the same* ||; that *he has borne their griefs and carried their sorrows* **; that *he has redeemed them from the curse* †† of all those evils they endure; that *he has by dying destroyed him that had the power of death* ††; that *he is now touched with the feeling of their infirmities* §§; and that he lives to take care of them in the hour of

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. † Heb. xiii. 5. ‡ Isa. xliii. 2.
§ Psal. lxxiii. 26. || Heb. ii. 14. ** Isa. liii. 4.
†† Gal. iii. 13. †† Heb. ii. 14. §§ Chap. iv. 13.

death, and by his own kind hand to conduct them safe to mansions of eternal glory! These truths are evidently adapted to compose the mind, to reconcile it to the will of God, and to inspire it with resolution. Sickneſs indeed is not a time for cloſe and fixed meditation. The thoughts are uſually broken and confuſed, and the attention diſturbed and interrupted. Yet a glance only at theſe matters, hath a happy and ſalutary effect to hold up the ſinking Chriſtian from deſpair, and keep him ſteady amidſt the ſtorms of his approaching diſſolution. God is pleaſed likewiſe to ſtrengthen his mind for ſuch reflections, to impreſs them with power on his heart, and to make them effectual to the purpoſes juſt mentioned. So that as the outward man decays, the inward is renewed day by day. What ſerenity have the countenances of ſome timorous Chriſtians aſſumed, whiſt their friends have been reminding them of theſe truths! How have their pains been ſoothed by theſe pleaſant ſounds! And how have they expreſſed, though with faltering lips, the inward ſatisfaction and compoſure they have felt! — “The foundation of God
“ ſtandeth ſure — He is faithful that hath
“ promiſed — I have caſt anchor on his
“ truth and goodneſs — There I leave myſelf
“ — I hope,

"— I hope, I trust all is well." But it is the happiness of some of them,

3. To enjoy at this critical season an assurance of faith.

They are not only well satisfied of the grounds on which their future expectations are built, and have a good hope through grace, as the apostle expresses it^u; but they are relieved of all their doubts, and possess a firm persuasion of their everlasting felicity. *Fear and dread fall upon their enemies, as Moses says of the Canaanites; they are as still as a stone, till thy people pass over, thy people, O Lord, whom thou hast purchased**. The conflicts which they before endured are now at an end. The grand question is decided. They know whom they have believed, and are persuaded that he is able to keep what they have committed to him against that day[†]. They are sealed with the Spirit of promise[‡], and are waiting for their dismissal, hence to glory.

O how fair the appearance religion now assumes! How attractive the charms it now wears! Who can behold the dying Christian in this temper, without envying him of the pleasure he feels? His joys it may be are not extatic and triumphant;

^u 2 Thes. ii. 16. * Exod. xv. 16. † 2 Tim. i. 12.
[‡] Eph. i. 13.

yet he is more than composed, for he is chearful; more than peaceful, for he is happy. He possesses himself. And smiling upon his friends, instead of waiting to receive consolation from them, he becomes their instructor and comforter. How calm his reasonings! How pleasing his reflections! How gentle and persuasive his admonitions! From him then let us now learn what it is to die, and what is the use of religion in death — “ Life with all its
“ pleasant scenes is passing away; but I
“ regret not its loss. I have long since
“ pronounced vanity on the world: more
“ substantial blifs I have in prospect — Af-
“ flicted I am; yet my affliction is light
“ and momentary, less far less than I have
“ deserved. ’Tis the will of my heavenly
“ Father, and I submit to it. He makes
“ my pillow easy, and why should I mur-
“ mur? — Death I see approaching; but
“ I am not afraid to die. My sins, which
“ I have felt and bewailed, the blood of
“ Christ hath done away; and being recon-
“ ciled by his death, how much more shall
“ I be saved by his life! O how precious
“ is Christ now to my soul! How reviving
“ the hope of dwelling for ever with him!
“ — With you my friends I must quickly
“ part; but I have a better company to
“ join,

“join. — I commit you into the hands of
 “a good God, and hope to meet you again.
 “— O make him your trust, and he will
 “never forsake you.” — Happy man!
 Who would not be glad in this temper of
 mind to make his exit hence? — And yet
 a higher degree of happiness still is the ex-
 alted privilege of some few holy men of
 God: for there are those,

4. Who pass off the stage of life tri-
 umphantly.

To composure succeeds cheerfulness; to
 cheerfulness assurance; and to assurance an
 extasy of divine joy — an elevation of the
 mind to God that is truly noble and asto-
 nishing; and yet widely different from the
 unmeaning raptures of imagination and en-
 thusiasm. It is the genuine effect, not of
 an artificial management of the passions,
 but of a deep and lively impression of eternal
 things upon the heart. It is a kind of ex-
 ultation that, instead of weakening or ob-
 structing the powers of reason, refines and
 improves them. For the same heavenly
 ray that warms, enlightens; beams upon
 the understanding, while it enkindles the
 affections. — O with what refulgent splen-
 dor do the glories of the other world now
 dart upon the whole soul, and light it into

one bright and inextinguishable flame! How doth the countenance of the transfigured Christian, if I may so describe him, resemble that of an angel of God, while like Stephen he sees the glory of God, and Jesus standing at his right hand; and while like Elijah his immortal spirit ascends to heaven in a chariot of celestial fire! All thoughts about the present world, all dread of death, yea his very pains are absorbed and swallowed up in that sense he feels of the love of God, and in those transporting perceptions of approaching bliss which overwhelm his heart. He is just setting foot on the shore of Canaan — at the very suburbs of heaven — stretching out the hand to seize the crown. His imprisoned spirit impatient of confinement is ready to burst the shell, and to force its passage out of this tenement of clay. He can scarce contain himself. His joy is unspeakable and full of glory. Now with the great apostle he sings, — “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth me the victory through Jesus Christ my Lord.” Now with Job he exults, — “O that my words were written

“ 1 Cor. xv. 56, 57.

“in a book! that they were graven with
 “an iron pen and lead, in the rock for ever!
 “For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and
 “that he shall stand at the latter day on
 “the earth. And though after my skin,
 “worms destroy this body; yet in my flesh
 “shall I see God* — I now see him — It
 “is enough —”. Thus led by the hand
 of the good Shepherd, and thus comforted
 with his rod and his staff, he passes joyfully
 the dark valley of the shadow of death;
 and even before he gets through it, joins
 the angelic throng who wait his arrival, in
 the new and triumphant song of Moses and
 the Lamb. — And now,

III. What improvement is to be made of
 these things? Why,

I. From the terrors of death, as you
 have heard them described, we may take
 our measures of sin. God is unquestionably
 most wise and good. And death is in the
 apprehension both of nature and conscience
 a very great evil. Mankind must therefore
 have offended God in a very high degree,
 or he would not have inflicted so ignomi-
 nious and bitter a curse upon them. Go,
 ye who make a mock of sin, see the king

* Job xix. 23 — 26.

of terrors wreaking his resentments on the impenitent and ungodly, and then say, Whether that which gives the last enemy so ghastly a countenance, and arms him with such sharp and poisonous darts, is not of all evils the greatest? O if men did but seriously listen to the great truths which this last solemn event teaches, they would not, they could not think so lightly of sin, much less so greedily commit it, as they commonly do!

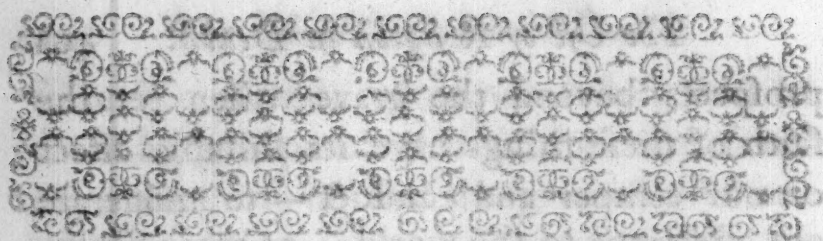
2. How infinitely are we indebted to the blessed God, for that glorious deliverance from the terrors of death and its tremendous consequences, which the gospel so mercifully proposes! Death had made an eternal sacrifice of every individual of the human species to the just resentments of Heaven, had not the Son of God interposed, and by dying satisfied the demands of justice, and destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil. O amazing love of the Father, that he should not spare his own Son, but freely give him up for our sakes! And O amazing love of Christ, that he should taste death in all the bitterness of it, to provide for our support and comfort in these trying moments! What gratitude, as well as joy, should inspire

fire our hearts, while we reflect thus on the infinite expence at which we are saved from the curse of this the greatest of natural evils, and in the prospect of which the stoutest heart trembles!

3. What an inestimable blessing is true religion! It is the only thing that will stand us in stead in the hour of death. Neither wealth, nor power, nor greatness, nor friends, will be of any avail then. Men may despise it when they are in health and strength, and in the midst of affluence and pleasure: but where is the wretch that dares laugh at it in the immediate views of eternity? — Ah! no. They then think otherwise. Had they millions of worlds, they would part with them all, to obtain the comforts and hopes I have been just now describing. How desirable then is an interest in Christ! He alone can save an immortal soul from the miseries of the second death, and give it an admission into the realms of light and glory above. O may this therefore be the grand object of our concern, and may every thing else be held in sovereign contempt when compared with this the greatest good! In one word,

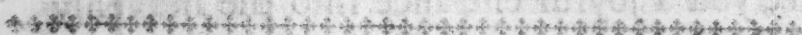
4. If there are such supports provided for the dying Christian, and such bright prospects

prospects beyond the grave; then let the faith of these things have its suitable effect on our temper and conduct — to moderate our affections to the world — to reconcile us to our afflictions — to infuse sweetness into our enjoyments — and to subdue in us the fear of death. *The Lord is your Shepherd, Christian, you shall not want.* He will take care of you all the days of your pilgrimage on earth. He will sustain you with his rod and staff in the valley of the shadow of death. And he will at length give you a joyful entrance into the heavenly world, where you shall dwell in his house for ever.



DISCOURSE XVII.

The final Consummation of Religion and glory in Heaven.



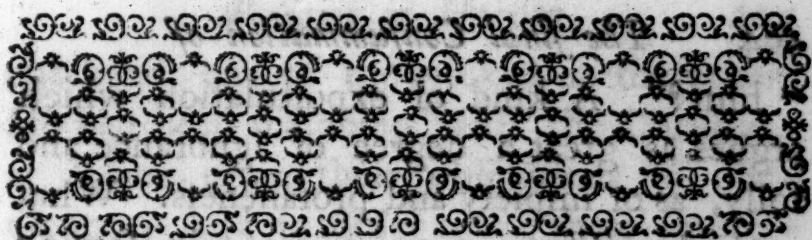
PART I.



ROMANS VI. 23.

The end ever-lasting life.

WHAT profit shall we have if we pray to him, that we should serve him; and what is the Almighty language of the men of this world? "What is the Almighty language of the men of this world?"



DISCOURSE XVII.

The final Consummation of Religion in Heaven.

PART I.

ROMANS vi. 22.

———— *The end everlasting life.*

IT hath ever been the perverse
I language of the men of this
world, “What is the Almighty
“that we should serve him? and
“what profit shall we have if we pray to
D d 2 “him?”

“him?” A kind of expostulation which argues as great a degree of ignorance and folly, as of impiety and profaneness. What profit? — There is great profit in serving God. Thousands in every age have borne this honourable testimony to real religion. A mighty prince, and the wisest too that ever swayed an earthly sceptre, hath told us that *the ways of wisdom are pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*^y. And the great apostle of Christ, whose testimony is unquestionable, hath assured us, that *godliness is profitable unto all things, having a promise of the life that now is*^z. But, admitting that it were in some respects otherwise — admitting that the path in which the Christian is led, were dark rough and intricate, and that temptations dangers and sorrows awaited him all his way through this wilderness; yet still the profit is great, inconceivably great: for THE END IS EVERLASTING LIFE.

Such you see is the language of the text. And the argument receives no small additional force from the very striking light in which the apostle hath placed it; I mean the contrast he forms between the characters and future condition of the righteous on the

^y Prov. iii. 17,

^z 1 Tim. iv. 8.

one hand, and of the wicked on the other. He had been reasoning with the Christians at Rome upon their obligations to obedience. And in order to fix these impressions the deeper in their hearts, he reminds them of the miserable state they were in while under the power of sin and unbelief; and then opposes to that state their present happy condition, and their future glorious prospects. *What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.*

And thus may the very same question be retorted upon the men of vice and sin, which, as we have observed, they are so prone to put to the Christian—What profit have you in serving Satan, and the lusts of your own hearts? You will say perhaps in the language your master would have once put into the mouth of Job, “Think you we serve him for naught?”—No. We don’t think you serve him for naught. You have your reward, such as it is! even the poor pittance of some little transient sensual pleasure, which fails not to bring after it either sooner or later shame and

miser^y. *The wages of sin is death*^a. But as to the man of religion, though he may be exposed to some present outward inconveniencies; yet, having his fruit unto holiness, he even now participates the joys of faith, and in the end shall possess eternal life.

By *eternal life* is meant the happy condition of good men in the world to come. It is expressive of their existence after death, of the perfection to which their nature shall attain, and of the uninterrupted felicity they shall enjoy to all eternity. How well the phrase is adapted to convey each of these ideas, and with what propriety therefore it is so frequently used in scripture to describe the heavenly state, I hardly need observe. Now the text tells us that *the end* is eternal life; a mode of expression which may,

1. Point out the *term* at which the future happiness of the Christian shall commence, even the close or period of the present life. When this life ends that shall begin. To the short winter-day we spend here on earth, shall *immediately* succeed one long never-ending age of bliss and glory in heaven.

^a Ver. 23.

Some there are who defer the happiness of the saints to the morning of the resurrection, and suppose the soul sleeps with the body till that time. A notion this which, methinks, cannot fail of casting a gloom over the minds of good men, on the one hand, who must needs wish to remain in possession of themselves after death; and of affording pleasure to the wicked, on the other, who would gladly get rid, though it were but for a time, of the painful reflections and fears which their guilt excites. This objection may indeed seem to be removed by the consideration, that the two points of the soul's falling asleep and awaking must to its own apprehension be united, there being in this case no consciousness during the intervening space. But (not to say how few there are upon whom such a refinement will be likely to have any effect) it is farther to be objected to this notion, that if the soul may sleep for a hundred or a thousand years, it may for aught there is in the soul itself sleep for ever: and so all the arguments in favor of a future state, arising from the natural immortality of the soul, are intirely destroyed. The definition however of the soul, as being an active conscious principle, and of a nature per-

fectly remote from matter, seems to me the most just and accurate that can be given of it. And if that be admitted, I do not see how the idea of its sleeping, or ceasing to think and act, can be reconciled to it. — But it is by scripture that our faith, as Christians, must be regulated: and I cannot perceive any real ground in that sacred book for this displeasing notion. On the contrary, our Saviour evidently takes the doctrine of a separate state for granted in the parable of Dives and Lazarus^b. He clearly asserts it in his words to the penitent thief on the cross, *To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise*^c. And as the apostle's declaring that he judged it far better for him to be with Christ than to continue here, supposes it^d; so the same apostle elsewhere expressly speaks of being absent from the body, and present with the Lord^e. Nor is there any intimation given us in scripture, as I remember, that a separate state of existence is a privilege peculiar to the apostles. It follows therefore that the end of the present life, is to the Christian the term at which his future happiness will commence. Again,

^b Luke xvi. 19. — ult.

^c Luke xxiii. 43.

^d Phi-

^e 2 Cor. v. 8.

ed2. The phrase may be designed to intimate yet farther, that the happiness which the saints enjoy in heaven, is the *perfection* of what they in a degree attain to here on earth. And so this future eternal life is to be considered not only in opposition to their existence here, but likewise in reference to that divine life which is here begun in their hearts. The apostle had been speaking of their having their fruit unto holiness; and so very properly adds, that *the end* or the final completion of this life of holiness on earth will be *eternal life* in heaven.

When men are converted and become truly religious, they are represented in scripture as being *quickened* or made alive by the grace of God *. *They have eternal life*, that is, the seeds, the beginning, the dawn of eternal life, *in them* †. And when they are removed hence, these principles or habits of grace which were thus generated in their hearts here, are ripened matured and brought to their utmost perfection. Now this description of heaven furnishes us with perhaps the most clear and just conceptions of the happiness of it, that are attainable in the present life. For we need only recur to what true religion is, and having divested it of the error weakness and

* Eph. ii. 5.

† 1 John iii. 15.

imperfection.

imperfection which at present attend it, we at once get a bright and pleasing idea, though still but a partial one, of what the bliss and glory of that world really is. It is the knowledge of the blessed God and of our Lord Jesus Christ in its most improved and perfect state; a knowledge which even now sometimes entertains surprises and animates the Christian. It is the consummation of those divine virtues and graces, which even at present adorn the good man, and render him in a degree happy and useful. There he will actually be what he here sincerely aims and ardently wishes to be. Fix your eyes, Sirs, upon the man who is best skilled in divine knowledge: in him you see the early dawn of that light which irradiates the minds of the blessed above. Mark the countenance, the temper, the deportment of the Christian, who excels in meekness humility love and obedience: in him you see the lineaments, the features, the distant resemblance of those who are grown up to the stature of men in Christ Jesus, who are now of age, and are entered upon the possession of that inheritance of which they were the other day the heirs and expectants only. *The end is eternal life* — the perfection of real genuine religion, the highest improvement

ment of virtue, the final consummation of grace. — Once more,

3. Eternal life is *the end* of holiness as it is the *reward* of it. They who have their fruit unto holiness shall assuredly receive this recompence at the hand of divine mercy. Not that there can be any merit in the obedience of a creature, restored as he is from a state of guilt and apostasy to the favor and love of God. They who never sinned have yet no demand to make upon their Creator, but on the contrary most humbly acknowledge that all they enjoy they owe to his goodness. Much less hath the holiness of a Christian, defective and polluted as it is, the least pretension to merit. *If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities;* says the psalmist, *O Lord, who shall stand?* and our Saviour requires us, when we have done all those things we were commanded, to say, *We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.* And such will be, such is the temper of every real disciple of Jesus. Whilst therefore the apostle, in the verse immediately following the text, speaks of death as *the wages* of sin, he represents eternal life as *the gift* of God; and as the gift of God through

^f Psalm cxxx. 3.

^g Luke xvii. 10.

Jesus Christ our Lord, he having not only by his ministry brought life and immortality to light, but by his obedience and death expiated our offences and reconciled us to God. So that the divine justice is secured from all imputation of partiality, while mercy triumphs in bestowing heaven on those who had violated the laws of their Creator. And yet the blessedness of the future state is often spoken of in scripture under the notion of a reward. The reasons of which may be — Because, though it is the reward of grace, it is promised to them and to them only who have their fruit unto holiness — Because men will be dealt with at the last judgment according to their real characters, that is, the wicked will be condemned, and the righteous will be acquitted, the merit of their salvation being at the same time referred to the mediation of Christ alone — Because, farther, there will be degrees of happiness dispensed to Christians, according to their various capacities and services, as seems plain from many passages of scripture — And, in a word, the matter is so represented, to animate us to diligence and perseverance in our course of duty and suffering.

And

And now, having explained the text with as much brevity as I well could, we proceed to discourse more particularly of that ETERNAL LIFE which is the end of the happy experience and practice of true religion; and which *he* shall most certainly enjoy, who *being made free from sin becomes a servant to God, and hath his fruit unto boldness.* And here I shall,

I. Lay before you the evidence we have of a future state of happiness;

II. Attempt some description of that state; and,

III. Make a suitable improvement of this very important and animating subject.

I. Let us begin with the evidence of a future state of happiness.

So generally does the doctrine of rewards and punishments after death obtain in the world, that an inquiry into the grounds of it may at first view seem unnecessary. But whoever considers that there are some few who deny this great doctrine, or however do their utmost to persuade themselves, that
it

it hath no other foundation than in mere fancy and superstition; that the greater part of mankind take the question for granted, without entering seriously into the merits of it; and that those who hold it upon the fullest and clearest evidence of reason and conscience, and most sincerely wish there may be a future state, are yet sometimes afflicted with doubts concerning it: whoever I say considers these things, and reflects likewise on the infinite importance of the matter, and on the thick and impenetrable darkness which Providence hath cast over the world to come, so that we can converse with it by faith only; he must see the utility of calling up to our view, for a few moments, some of the main arguments both natural and revealed in favor of this one of the first principles of religion. Now, *The possibility* of a future state of existence will be acknowledged on all hands. The idea does not involve in it a contradiction absurdity or impossibility. There is no one principle of nature or dictate of reason that is shocked or surprised at the thought. Nay, admitting that there is a God, it follows that he who gave the conscious spirit existence, can easily continue it in existence, even after its connection with the present
blow state

state ceases; and that he who created this world which furnishes such stupendous proofs of almighty power, can be at no loss to make provision in another for the rewarding his friends and punishing his enemies. But,

2. There is a high *probability* of such a state, as appears from many considerations obvious to the perceptions and reasonings of every man.

We have each of us a power of thinking reflecting willing and performing various acts, wherein our business happiness and importance as intelligent creatures consist. This active conscious principle we call the soul. It hath its seat at present in the body; though it is evidently of a nature very different from the body, and hath no symptoms or appearances attending it, which foretell its passing under such changes as are common to matter. The intire extinction of thought will and consciousness, or in other words the annihilation of the soul, is an unnatural idea, and gives pain to every mind, except his whose guilt excites a dread of something worse than a privation of existence. Nay, there is in all mankind an eager appetite or desire of immortality. And one should hardly suppose that he who made us

would

would infuse such a propensity into our nature, without any intention to gratify it.

It is a fact likewise, that this notion of the immortality of the soul hath generally obtained in the world^a. The heathens had an idea of it, some of them firmly believing it, others amidst all their doubts earnestly wishing it might prove true, and the rest, few if any of them, absolutely denying it. Now the general prevalence of this doctrine is not easily to be accounted for, without allowing that it hath some foundation in truth and reason. Admitting however that the notion first sprung from mere fancy and imagination, that it was quickly adopted and improved by artful men to answer secular and political purposes, and that so it became universal; yet it should seem strange, that an infinitely wise and good God should in no age interpose his authority, to undeceive men upon a point of so interesting a nature.

To which it should be added, that if the history of man is confined to the present life, and hath no connection with a future, the ways of providence in general are enveloped in impenetrable darkness and my-

^a — Permanere animos arbitramur consensu nationum omnium, &c. Cic. *Tusc. Quæst. lib. 1.*

stery, and we are deprived, in a great many particular instances, of the only means of defending the wisdom and justice of God from the imputation of weakness and partiality. — As to the general conduct of providence. There is an amazing exertion of power in the building adorning and supporting the curious fabric of this world. But how strange that the Blessed God should be at so prodigious an expence, if his only object were to provide for the entertainment of a succession of short-lived creatures, who when they die should cease to exist*, and whose characters and actions should have no reference to a future state. No one can examine carefully the history of the world, without being struck with surprize at the various stupendous events and revolutions which have taken place in it, and without acknowledging, methinks, that they must have come to pass by the permission and influence of divine providence. But what shall we think of the wisdom of God or of his other attributes, if we will not admit that these events bear a relation to one grand plan,

si sine causa gignimur, si in hominibus procreandis providentia nulla versatur, si casu nobismetipsis ac voluptatis nostrae gratia nascimur; si nihil post mortem sumus: quid potest esse tam super vacuum, tam inane, tam vanum, quam humana res est, quam mundus ipse? LACTANT. lib. 7.

which when completed shall be exhibited to the view of the whole intelligent creation, and especially to them who have been the instruments employed to carry it into execution?

And then as to individuals. It is a fact, which they who believe and who do not believe the bible must acknowledge, that there are some righteous and some wicked men, some comparatively good and some bad, some who have the fear of God before their eyes and some who riot in wantonness and sin. And it is also as evident, that the blessings of providence are promiscuously dispensed among mankind; nay that the wicked often prosper, while the virtuous are oppressed and afflicted. Now, how natural is it to conclude from hence, that there is another state of existence wherein all these matters shall be explained, and both the justice and goodness of God vindicated and honoured? And however it may be thought by some, that there is a more equal distribution of happiness among mankind in the present life, than is commonly apprehended; yet even in this case it must be acknowledged, that it is the hopes and comforts of religion which have the chief influence in bringing matters to a balance. And it should seem strange indeed,

deed, that *that* which gives rise to the most rational and desirable joys of the present life, should in the end prove no other than a deception.

Thus probable is it, upon the principles of reason and present appearances, that the soul is immortal, and that there is a future state of rewards and punishments. But not to rest the matter here, there are,

3. Such farther grounds for our belief of these important truths, as amount to a *certainty*. For, if God hath given us a positive revelation from heaven to assure us of another state, and if that revelation is authenticated by such proof as cannot be rejected without manifest absurdity; the grand question we are here considering is put beyond all possible doubt. Well; such revelation God has given us, and is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament.

As to the Old Testament, though it does not treat so largely of this doctrine as the New; yet whoever attentively reads over that part of divine writ, and considers the explanation which Christ and his apostles give us of some passages in it which might otherwise seem obscure, will I think acknowledge that a future state was known and believed in the earliest ages of the

world, and that the light gradually increased as the times of the gospel approached. Not to mention those texts which speak of the future condition of the wicked, and the judgment that shall pass upon them; let me recite a few scriptures among many which tell us of the happiness prepared for good men, and which is the principal object of this discourse. *Enoch walked with God, and he was not: for God took him — translated him* to another world, where he should enjoy the rewards promised to those who please God in thisⁱ. The patriarchs in after-ages, if we will believe the writer to the Hebrews, *desired a better country* than that they possessed here on earth, even an heavenly; and *looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*^k. Job knew that his Redeemer lived, and that after the present life he should see God^l. Moses had respect unto the recompence of reward^m. David rejoiced in the certain hope of beholding the face of God in righteousness, and of being satisfied, when he should awake, with his likeness; and assures us, that there is verily a reward for the righteousⁿ. Daniel tells us, that many of

ⁱ Gen. v. 24. Heb. xi. 5. ^k v. 16, 10. ^l Job xix. 25.

^m Heb. xi. 26. ⁿ Psal. xvii. 15. — lxxiii. 11. 8. ^{duam}

them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt°. And, in a word, the prophet Hosea speaks much the same language, when with triumph he foretells our redemption from death and the grave¹.

But in the New Testament LIFE AND IMMORTALITY are brought to light—are elucidated and made more clear and plain than under the former dispensation². Our Lord Jesus Christ, to whose mediation we owe our hope of future happiness, hath himself placed this doctrine in the fullest light, assuring us that *the pure in heart shall see God*³, that *the righteous shall go into life eternal*⁴, and that as *his kingdom is not of this world, so it is his Father's good pleasure to give his little flock another, that is, an heavenly kingdom*. And his apostles after him insist largely upon this great fundamental truth of religion, both in their discourses and epistles; declaring in the strongest terms, that *God who cannot lie, had promised eternal life before the world began, that he had confirmed his promise by an oath, and put the matter be-*

¹ Dan. xii. 2. ² Hof. xiii. 14. ³ 2 Tim. i. 10. *perit* ⁴ *et*
⁵ Matth. v. 8. ⁶ Ch. xxv. 46. ⁷ Luke xii. 32.

yond all dispute by raising his own Son from the dead^u. Nor shall I here particularly recite the exalted descriptions they every where give us of the world to come, and their nervous and animating reasonings from thence to that temper and conduct, which is most pleasing to God, useful to society, and beneficial to ourselves.

The certainty then of this future state of happiness is no longer to be questioned, if these assurances of it can be fairly proved to come from God. And of this we have every kind of evidence that can be reasonably desired. Here I might remind you of the antiquity sublimity and purity of the sacred records; of the facts they relate, such as the miracles death resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, all supported by the most natural and convincing testimony; of the prophecies of the bible, and their exact accomplishment, many of them in former ages, and some of them in our own times; and of the amazing spread of the gospel, and the admirable effects it hath produced in the hearts and lives of men. I might call up to your view the characters of the sacred writers, who as they affirmed they were divinely inspired, and authenti-

• Tit. i. 2. Heb. vi. 17. 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

cated

cated their affirmation by the miraculous powers they exerted, so likewise gave abundant proof that they were neither enthusiasts on the one hand, nor deceivers on the other; but on the contrary men of sound understandings and honest hearts. I might farther put you in mind of the sufferings to which they exposed themselves, by their steady opposition to the prevailing passions and prejudices of the times; and of the noble sacrifice they many of them made of their lives to the cause of truth. I might add the full and satisfactory evidence we have, that these assurances of a future state of happiness have been preserved uncorrupt through the worst of times, by the special providence of God, and are truly conveyed down to us in these last ages of the world.

And now, who can question that the soul is immortal, that there is a future state of happiness and misery, that all mankind are amenable at the tribunal of the great God, and that their *end* who have had their fruit unto holiness shall be *everlasting life*? The evidence amounts to moral certainty. It is acknowledged indeed that the world to come is invisible: but if on that account its reality is to be

disputed, there is an end to all testimony, and we may be justified in believing nothing but what is the immediate object of our senses. He who hath been in heaven has himself told us that there is a heaven; and having solemnly assured us of it, he has in our nature passed into that world. Thousands have believed it, and their faith of it has made them wiser better and happier. And bad men, though from a consciousness of their unmeetness for it, they would fain extirpate the idea of a future state from their minds; yet know not how to resist the force of this evidence, when duly laid before them. O! that it may have its proper weight on all our minds, to awaken the thoughtless sinner to serious consideration, and to add firmness to that joy and pleasure which the Christian sometimes feels in the prospect of all this happiness and glory, of which I am quickly to attempt some faint description!

DISCOURSE

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DISCOURSE XVII.

PART II.

FROM the general view we have taken of the grounds of our faith as to a future state of happiness, I proceed now, as was proposed,

II. To attempt some description of that state.

It is indeed impossible, in the present life, to acquire adequate conceptions of the felicity and glory of heaven. Our faculties are too feeble for the investigation of a subject so sublime and exalted. Yet, if we would apply ourselves closely to it (and there is surely no subject so improving, or so entertaining to a serious mind!) we might, methinks, come at some juster and more animating ideas of the invisible world, than those

those with which we are too apt to content ourselves. The proper use of our reasoning powers, a due consideration of the present state of things and its connection with the future, a careful reflection upon what we have known and enjoyed of religion, and especially a diligent attention to the light which scripture hath thrown upon this matter, will greatly assist us in our inquiries. It is true, the most holy place is utterly concealed from the view of the generality of mankind, and from many of those too who worship in the court of the temple. But the vail *may* be drawn aside, Christ our great High Priest, who is passed into the heavens, *hath* drawn it aside for us; and we are permitted to look in without the imputation of profaneness or presumption. He hath opened a door in heaven, and bid us come up thither, that we may take a view, though but transient and imperfect, of the happiness and glory we are by and by to enjoy. Let us then obey the divine command, take our leave for a while of this vain and busy world, and by faith join the society of the Blessed.

The mind of man is so framed, that we acquire most of our knowledge in the present state by the aid of our senses. In con-

descension

descension therefore to our weakness, and to allure us to still farther inquiries, God has thought fit in his word to represent invisible things to our imagination, by sensible objects with which we are continually conversant. But, at the same time, he has taken care to caution us against acquiescing in those trifling and gross conceptions of heaven, with which Mahomet hath fondly amused his votaries, without ever guarding them against this danger. For the scriptures assure us that it is a spiritual state, and that the employments and fruitions of it are in truth infinitely more refined and noble, than any of the concerns of this world or the gratifications of sense.

Let us begin then with those descriptions of heaven which are borrowed from sensible objects, and by these steps ascend to a more clear spiritual and enlivening view of the blessedness of that state. And if we search the bible, we shall there find a collection of the richest and most brilliant images that nature or art can supply; all of them held up to our view in such a manner, as to impress our minds with a general idea of happiness wealth and splendor in their highest perfection. Sometimes we read of *treasures which moth cannot corrupt, nor thieves break*

break through and steal^v; of a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory^x; and of an inheritance incorruptible undefiled and which fadeth not away^y. Sometimes we are told of a rest that remaineth for the people of God^z, alluding to the land of Canaan which was given the Israelites for a quiet possession after their deliverance from Egyptian slavery, and their tedious wanderings in a barren and solitary wilderness. Sometimes we have heaven described as a paradise^a, furnished with all kinds of fruits, enriched with the most delightful prospects, and watered with rivers of pleasure^b; a paradise in which the inhabitants are none of them sick^c, but the lamb who is in the midst of the throne feeds them, and leads them unto living fountains of waters, and the Blessed God, with his own kind and soft hand, gently wipes away all tears from their eyes^d. Sometimes it is represented as a house, a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens^e, a house in which God resides, and wherein Christ hath prepared mansions or apartments for every one of the family^f. It is farther compared to a large

^v Mat. vi. 20. ^x 2 Cor. iv. 17. ^y 1 Pet. i. 4.
^z Heb. iv. 9. ^a Luke xxiii. 43. ^b Rev. xxii. 1, 2. ^c Isa.
 xxxiii. 24. ^d Rev. vii. 17. ^e 2 Cor. v. 1. ^f John xiv. 2.

and magnificent city, of which God is the builder, whose streets are gold, its gates pearl, and the foundation of it garnished with precious stones; a city which hath the Lord God Almighty for its sun to enlighten it, and its temple to adorn it; a city into which nothing that defileth can ever enter, whither the kings of the earth, and all the nations of the earth, bring their glory and honor, and where there is no night but one bright eternal day^g. And to give us a still more exalted idea of that blisful place, its vast extent, its splendor and magnificence, its order and regularity, its strength and safety, together with the number wealth peace happiness and glory of its inhabitants; it is described as a kingdom^h — a kingdom which in all these respects infinitely exceeds that of the Assyrians Greeks or Romans. Nay each one of the saints is to possess a kingdom, for they are all of them kings and priests unto God, and as such to wear crowns of righteousness and glory, and to be arrayed in robes of innocence and purityⁱ. But it were endless to enumerate the various figures, which scripture hath interwoven with the accounts it gives us

^g Rev. xxi. 9. — ult. ^h Mat. v. 10. &c. ⁱ Rev. i. 6. 2 Tim. iv. 8. Rev. vii. 14.

of the future happy state of good men. If this world, I mean the external frame of it, is amazingly beautiful and glorious; if the sun moon and stars furnish illustrious proofs of the wisdom and greatness of God; and if even the meanest part of the creation is capable of affording entertainment and surprize to an inquisitive and contemplative mind; how great must be the beauty magnificence and splendor of the heavenly world? that world where the great God gives the fullest display of his infinite perfections. O the immensity of that place! It hath no bounds. — The brightness of it! God is the sun. — The purity of it! Nothing that defileth shall ever enter into it. — *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him*^k.

Not, however, content with this general view of the heavenly blessedness, let us now more particularly consider — After what manner good men will exist in that state — The perfection to which their nature will attain — Their employment — The blessedness which will thence result

^k 1 Cor. ii. 9.

to them — And the duration of their happiness.

FIRST. After what manner will the saints exist in that world?

The two constituent parts of man are soul and body. These, in the present state, are closely united, and mutually act upon each other. But at death this union is dissolved, and *the dust returns to the earth as it was*, while *the spirit returns unto God who gave it*¹. — Now as to the soul, whether it exists and acts purely of itself, I mean, unconnected with any material substance; or whether it hath some vehicle provided for its reception, which is what some think the apostle intends by our *having a building of God, an house not made with hands eternal in the heavens*^m, is difficult to determine. Though indeed the difficulty attending either of these questions, appears to me to be much less than that of supposing the soul sleeps, a notion which I cannot but conclude, as we have already seen, is both unphilosophical and unscriptural. Without, however, entering into a curious disquisition of these matters, all

¹ Eccles. xii. 7.

^m 2 Cor. v. 1.

I shall here content myself with observing as to a separate state is, that the soul exists after such a manner as to be capable of exercising those powers which are essential to it, such as thought consciousness and reflection. And as to the body, we are assured that *that* will be raised at the last day, and become again the mansion or place of residence of the immortal spirit. Let us therefore immediately go on to consider,

SECONDLY. The perfection to which their respective natures will attain.

Here, imagination, under the guidance of scripture, may be allowed its utmost scope; though after all the most fruitful imagination must needs fail in the description. Indeed we can collect but few positive ideas of the future state of either soul or body; yet the divesting both the one and the other of all present imperfections, will possess us at once with exalted conceptions of their felicity and glory. To begin then,

IN the nobler part. What an amazing change must that be which passes on the *soul* of a good man, at the instant it is dislodged from the body! Its natural faculties are strengthened and enlarged, and

its

its moral powers refined and purified to the highest degree imaginable. Our intellects are evidently at present in a very imperfect and defective state. Such is the slowness and obscurity of our conceptions, such the weakness and fallibility of our judgment, and such the inattention and treachery of our memory, that we find much labor necessary in order to acquire a small degree of knowledge, we are often bewildered in our pursuit of the plainest truths, and before we are aware are frequently hurried into strange mistakes and errors. Nay, he who hath made the most considerable progress in knowledge whether natural or divine, cannot fail of lamenting his ignorance, and acknowledging with concern the dark feeble and contracted state of the human mind. Thus it is with us in the present life. But at death, all these grievances will be instantly redressed. Our intellectual powers will then receive such an accession of strength and vigor, as will add quickness facility and pleasure to all their operations. There will be no dullness of apprehension, or difficulty of judging, and of consequence no painful investigation of truth, no perplexed reasonings, no false and erroneous conclusions. The percep-

tion will be clear and easy, the judgment sound and steady, and the memory retentive and strong. All this the apostle plainly intimates in those memorable words of his, "*Now I know in part*, my knowledge, however superior to that of some other men, is imperfect, and a great deal of it acquired with much difficulty and labor; *but then shall I know even as also I am known*, my mental sight shall be so strengthened and enlarged, and divine objects shall be placed in such a point of light, as that my knowledge of them shall bear some resemblance to that of God, whose eye does not only glance at the surface of things, but enters into their nature, and instantly comprehends all their hidden qualities."

And then as to the moral powers of the soul, these will be refined from all the pollutions of sin and sense, and restored to a state of perfect rectitude and purity. The renovation of the heart is indeed the great object of religion in the present life; but that object is not, it cannot be fully attained while we are in the body. The best of men complain of evil propensities stubborn prejudices and irregular passions: and great

1 Cor. xiii. 12.

is their distress on these accounts. Ah! the bitter sighs that arise from their sorrowful breasts, while they silently deplore these sad effects of human depravity — these remains of corruption and sin, which disgrace the soul, disturb its peace, and obstruct its progress in the divine life. But, when death has done his office, these complaints shall all instantly subside. The very moment the imprisoned spirit is set at liberty, it is *made perfect*°. It springs, as it were, into life; for here it could hardly be said to live. It is healed of every disease, and becomes perfectly healthful and happy. It breathes the pure air of the celestial regions, free from all the oppressions of this gross atmosphere. It recovers its original beauty freedom and glory. Every corruption is totally eradicated from the heart; and every virtuous holy and divine principle implanted there, is at once ripened to a state of maturity. In short, as it is *created after the image of God in knowledge righteousness and true holiness*°, so it henceforth exerts all its powers in the pursuit of these great objects, with infinite ease and pleasure, and without a possibility of their enduring any disturbance or oppo-

° Heb. xii. 23.

° Eph. iv. 24. & Col. iii. 10.

sition whatever. Thus it *beholds the face of God in righteousness*, and awakes out of this world into the other *with the divine likeness*¹. — And now what a blessed change is this! And in how different a state does the Christian find himself from that he was in a moment before, when he animated a frail and mortal body! — And so I am led to speak,

2. Of the perfection to which the *body* shall attain. That, as I said, is at death consigned to the grave, to a state of inactivity and putrefaction. But at the last day it shall be raised. The voice of the descending Saviour shall shake the sepulchres of the dead, and rouse their sleepy inhabitants into life. The scattered *bones*, to use the visionary language of Ezekiel, *shall come together; the sinews and flesh shall come upon them, and the skin shall cover them above; the breath of the Lord shall breathe upon them, and they shall live, and stand up upon their feet, an exceeding great army*². Amazing sight! Nor will the bodies of the saints rise into the same state they were formerly in. Such a resurrection would be scarcely desirable. No. They will be-

¹ Ps. xviii. 15.

² Ezek. xxxvii. 4 — 10.

come spiritual glorious and immortal. They will be no more liable to any of the infirmities which attend them in this life, to decay of spirits beauty or strength; and so will require none of those supports and refreshments which nature now supplies. On the contrary, they will be ever healthy active and strong, and ever retain their original sprightliness and vigor, beauty and comeliness. The senses will be refined strengthened and enlarged. The eye, for instance, how quick penetrating and strong! No object however bright will dazzle it, or give it the least uneasy sensation. The shining countenance of Moses will no longer require a veil, no nor the more glorious countenance of Christ himself. The most distant object will be within its reach, and be as clearly beheld as if immediately present. Indeed the whole frame will be exquisitely beautiful, its proportion exact, its parts firm, its appearance lovely; suited in every respect to the guest it shall entertain, to the company with which it shall associate, to the world where it shall reside, and to the pure and spiritual services in which it shall ever be employed. The description which the apostle gives us of it is, most

^s 1 Cor. xv. 42, 43, 44.

438 *The final Consummation of*
grand and noble, when he tells us that
Christ himself *shall change our vile body,*
that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious
body, according to the working whereby he
is able even to subdue all things to himself.*
If the Son of God deigns to appear among
the saints above in a human body, we may
be assured it is a glorious body indeed.
How glorious then must their bodies be
which are fashioned after this divine model,
and upon which such extraordinary power
is exerted, and that by the immediate in-
fluence and operation of the Saviour him-
self! To these bodies then will the im-
mortal spirit be reunited, and the union
never more be dissolved. — And thus I am
led from this general view of the perfection
of their natures, to inquire,

THIRDLY, What is the employment of
the Blessed.

An indolent life is an unhappy life: it is
so to a man of spirit, who understands his
own proper interests and ends of existence.
We cannot therefore imagine, that they
who possess the dispositions and powers I
have been describing, spend an eternal du-

* Philip. iii. 21.

ration in sloth and dissipation. No. They are ever employed about matters of the highest and noblest concernment, and in a manner suited to their pure and perfect natures. Man is an intelligent and social creature: the chief business therefore of the heavenly world must consist in contemplation and conversation, that is, in the exercise of the mind upon subjects infinitely entertaining and improving, and in a mutual exchange of ideas on such subjects. And from hence must result the most refined blessedness, which we shall attempt quickly to describe. In the mean time, let us take a general view of the company with which the blessed spirits above associate — the subject matter of their contemplation and discourse — and the manner in which these exercises are conducted.

1. As to the company with which they associate.

In this world but little agreeable society is to be met with, but few to whom we can freely unbosom ourselves, yea none in whose acquaintance we can be perfectly happy. So that we are ready sometimes to grow weary of the world, and to say with Job, *I lothe it, I would not live al-*

way". But in heaven the scene will be quite reversed. We shall commence a never-ending friendship, and an intire union of heart, with persons of the most amiable and worthy characters, and who possess every possible excellence and perfection suited to the rank they hold. We shall join *the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven — the spirits of just men made perfect — an innumerable company of angels — Jesus the mediator of the new covenant — and God himself the judge of all*.

Do the tender feelings of nature, heightened and improved by the still nobler affections of virtue and religion, excite in our breasts an ardent desire to be admitted again to the embraces of our dear departed friends and relatives, with whom we have had sweet communion here on earth, and who are now with God? That desire will be gratified, with the additional satisfaction of finding both them and ourselves in a state of perfect happiness and glory. When we trace the characters of great and good men, as drawn in the sacred pages, men famous for their simplicity meekness and love, for their patience fortitude and piety; do our

" Job vii. 16.

" Heb. xii. 22, 23, 24.

passions kindle into a flame, and are we almost ready to burst the bands of mortal flesh, that we may mingle with these blessed spirits above? Such also will be our exalted privilege at death. With Enoch, who walked with God here on earth, we shall intimately converse in heaven. In the bosom of Abraham, the father of the faithful, we shall gently repose our weary souls. The transfigured countenance of Moses, the great lawgiver of the church, we shall behold with a steady eye. And with rapturous pleasure shall we hang on the devout songs of David, the sweet singer of Israel. Patriarchs prophets and apostles, the illustrious army of confessors, *who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the lamb*^{*}, Christians of every rank and condition among men, will be our associates and companions. Their number cannot be told. Their happiness cannot be conceived. Their honors cannot be described. They are all of one mind, and one heart; so that their friendly commerce can suffer no interruption, through difference of opinion, unhappiness of temper, or any hasty prejudices whatever. They are

* Rev. vii. 14.

knit to one another with indissoluble bands of esteem and love ; and all the rich treasures of knowledge and pleasure which each one possesses, are cheerfully laid out to promote the growing entertainment and happiness of the whole. What a blessed company this !

Angels also make up a part of the society — Those spirits of superior rank, so variously described in scripture to denote their different degrees of knowledge authority and glory — Those constant worshippers of the supreme Majesty, ministers of his pleasure, and guardians of his people^y — Those *morning stars that sang together*, those *sons of God who shouted for joy at the creation of the world*^z — Those *flames of fire* whom David celebrates in the psalms^a — Those armies of the living God, a host of which was detached to welcome the Saviour into the world, to minister to him during his pilgrimage on earth, and to attend him afterwards to glory. How prodigious is their number ? *ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands*^b, yea a number that cannot be reckoned^c. How vast their knowledge dominion and power ?

^y Psal. xxxiv. 7.^z Job xxviii. 7.^a Psal. civ. 4.^b Rev. v. 11.^c Heb. xii. 22.

They excel in wisdom and strength^a. How extensive their benevolence and love? They desire to look into the mystery of redemption^e; and while they dwell on the rapturous subject, they strike their harps with infinite exultation and joy to the new song of Moses and the Lamb^f.

In the midst of this illustrious multitude is seen the Divine Jesus, who infinitely outshines them all in splendor and glory. O who can describe the superior mixture of sweetness and majesty, which distinguishes his countenance from theirs who stand around him? In Him centre all beauty excellence and perfection. *He is the chiefest among ten thousand, he is altogether lovely^g.* There, I say, is seen that Jesus, who the other day was a poor despised afflicted man; but is now a happy glorious exalted Prince: who the other day expired in agonies upon a cross; but is now seated upon a throne, *hath a name written on his vesture and on his thigh, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS^h*, and reigns uncontrouled sovereign over the universe. There he unveils his matchless glories to the view of millions of admiring spectators, converses in-

^a Psal. ciii. 20. ^e 1 Pet. i. 12. ^f Rev. v. 12.

^g Sol. Song, v. 10, 16. ^h Rev. xix. 16.

timately and familiarly with each one of them, and pours the richest blessings into their hearts. *Father, I will*, said he in his last prayer here on earth, *that they whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory*¹. And his glory they do behold, for they *see him face to face*^k, without any of those mediums which this our distant state requires, and without any of those interruptions and allays which arise from sin and sense.

But more than this, God is with them. *In thy presence*, says David, *is fulness of joy, at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore*^l. *The pure in heart*, says Christ, *shall see God*^m. And when the apostle John would give us the brightest description of that state which language can furnish, he tells us, that *God Almighty is the temple, and the glory of God the light thereof*ⁿ. It is the exalted privilege of good men in this life to converse with God; and when, upon some extraordinary occasions, the distant rays of his infinite perfections beam upon their understandings, with the patriarch they cry out, *How dreadful is this place? it is the house of God, the gate of heaven*^o.

¹ John xvii. 24. ^k 1 Cor. xiii. 12. ^l Ps. xvi. ult.
^m Mat. v. 8. ⁿ Rev. xxi. 22, 23. ^o Gen. xxviii. 17.

But

But in that other world he is seen, he is conversed with, he is enjoyed after a more perfect manner. He is present, intimately and immediately present, with each one of those happy spirits. And, O! how inconceivably bright and glorious are the emanations of light love and joy, which they every moment derive from that great fun of righteousness, that pure and inexhaustible fountain of all good! — Such then is the company with which they associate. And now,

2. As to the subjects of their contemplation and discourse; we may be sure they are most interesting and important, infinitely diversified, and exquisitely ravishing and delightful.

To know the only true God, our Saviour assures us, is life eternal^p. Indeed the divine essence can never be comprehended by a finite mind. Yet such a light will perhaps be reflected upon that mysterious communion of deity which subsists between the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, as will enable us to apprehend more clearly than we do now this great truth, which bears so immediate a relation to the scheme of our redemption. In that day *we shall know that*

^p John xvii. 3.

Christ,

Christ, the true God and eternal life¹, is in the Father²; and that the Holy Spirit the Comforter proceedeth from him³.

The perfections of God, as displayed in his works, will then appear in all their native beauty harmony and glory, not, as they do at present, beclouded by the thick mists which ignorance and folly have cast before our eyes. Alas! the most sagacious philosopher is now overwhelmed with perplexity, while he wanders through this amazing system of being, surveys the innumerable orders of creatures which inhabit and adorn our earth, considers their several capacities relations and uses, and attempts to investigate their various hidden qualities powers and operations. And though, amidst this croud of objects, he sees enough of God to fill his breast with astonishing ideas of greatness and glory; yet he can do little more than humbly trace the distant shadows of divine excellencies, and imperfectly spell out the name of the great Parent of the universe. But then, it may be, all the knotty questions, all the hard problems in natural science, which now exercise the wit and ingenuity of men, will be solved, the connection between causes

¹ 1 John v. 20.

² John xiv. 20.

³ Ch. xv. 26.

and

and effects be clearly understood, and the beauty harmony and use of every part of the creation be evidently perceived. What a prodigious variety here for meditation and discourse! and what amazing discoveries of wisdom power and glory must break in upon the astonished mind! All the natural knowledge of which Solomon could boast, is but like the fond conceits of children, when compared with that light which will irradiate the minds of the Blessed.

There is a providence which governs the world, and hath an invisible and powerful influence in the affairs of every individual. And in the scheme of providence, however complicated its several parts, there is a perfect unity of design: so that the infinitely numerous and diversified events which take place in our world, are all some way or other subservient to one grand end; and, in the compassing that end, there must be an amazing display of wisdom power and goodness. This is a subject therefore of vast extent, and furnishes an inexhaustible variety of matter for contemplation and discourse. But, alas! at present, so weak is our mental sight, that we can scarce read a line in this prodigious volume of providence without hesitating; and we have no
sooner

sooner taken a step in this intricate path, than we are at a loss which way to turn. While therefore with the apostle we lift up our astonished eyes to heaven and say, *How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out*! it becomes us patiently and implicitly to submit to *his* will, who we are sure does all things well. But in that better world, that land of knowledge and vision, the mysteries of providence will perhaps be unfolded, and the history of mankind from the beginning of time to the final consummation of all things, be fully explained and understood. *What I do*, says the great Governor of the world to us, as he once said to Peter, *ye know not now; but ye shall know hereafter*". The counsels of heaven respecting empires kingdoms and particular societies of men, the means destined for carrying them into execution, and the harmonious and successful operation of these means to the great and noble ends proposed, will be all laid open to our view. And O! what a scene of wonders will our eyes here behold? Nor will a recollection of these great events swallow up the remembrance of what hath happened to ourselves. Each one will

* Rom. xi. 33.

" John xiii. 7.

have an exact and ample view of his own history, and will see, with pleasure and astonishment inexpressible, how artfully every circumstance of his life, however strange and unpromising, was so disposed as at once to promote his own good, and to advance the general plan respecting the whole. The patriarch Joseph, that favourite of Providence, will tell how every event in his history, bore a relation both to his own personal interests, and to the future fortunes of his family and the Jewish and Christian churches. O! what amazing discoveries will this fountain of knowledge and pleasure pour upon the inquisitive mind! But are we to stop here? No——

There is a still more exalted subject than even the administration of Providence to employ the attention of the Blessed, that is, the great work of *Redemption*. A subject this of all others the most sublime and noble, and fruitful of infinite entertainment and delight. Here the divine glories are collected as it were in one point, and so held up to the view of the mind, as to possess it of the most perfect idea of God that can possibly be framed. The magnificence of Ahasuerus the Persian monarch, on ordi-

nary occasions, was great; but when in the fulness of his joy he resolves to assemble all his princes and servants in Shushan his palace, there to make one grand exhibition of the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honor of his excellent majesty, how must his magnificence have exceeded? So, if the parallel be lawful, the Supreme Majesty seems to have devised and adjusted the great plan of our redemption in such a manner, as that, besides the benefit resulting from it to individuals (a matter comparatively speaking of trifling consideration), it should become an occasion of displaying his brightest glories, to the view of the myriads of happy beings assembled in his palace above. Here is a concurrence of truths too sublime and august, too strange and marvellous, too various and complicated, to be capable of description by human language. Wherever we turn our eyes, whether on the facts the gospel relates concerning the person of Christ, his offices, his miracles, his sufferings, his death, and the triumphs that succeeded it; or on the scheme of redemption itself, the infinite extent grandeur and harmony of the plan, the amazing glories it reflects on all the

† *Ether* i. 3, 4, 5.

divine attributes, the relation it bears to the general scheme of Providence, and the influence it hath on the happiness of millions of beings through an eternal duration of existence; wherever, I say, we turn our eyes we are lost in contemplation and wonder. What inexhaustible sources are there here for the entertainment of the Blessed! — God manifest in the flesh! — The Creator of the world expiring on a cross! — Guilt, complicated guilt, expiated! — Innocence retrieved! — Justice satisfied, yet mercy triumphant! — Death swallowed up in victory! — The powers of darkness routed and overthrown! — The miserable vassals of Satan made heirs of God! — Humanity united to Deity! — Angels confirmed in their bliss! — And the happiness of every individual of that vast and boundless empire, infinitely augmented by this astonishing display of wisdom power and love!

And now, amidst all these works of God, can there be subjects wanting to excite the curiosity, to fix the attention, to entertain the imagination, or to improve and gladden the hearts of the perfect spirits above? — Nor is there, I should farther add,

1013. Any kind of difficulty or embarrassment attending these exercises of contemplation and discourse, as they are conducted in that world. This may be easily concluded from what we have already observed concerning the perfect state to which the powers of human nature shall attain.

1110. Alas! in the present life, be the subjects we contemplate ever so sublime and exalted, there are a thousand circumstances, both within us and all around us, to impede and perplex the operations of the mind, and to restrain and cool the divine passions of the heart. No sooner have we at any time retired from the world, composed ourselves to meditation, and begun to taste the sweetness of the pleasing theme we had resolved to pursue, but instantly our promised bliss is assaulted, spoiled and laid waste, by a rude band of wild and impertinent thoughts, if not vile and base affections. Or if the devotion of the heart is strong enough to secure to us the possession of ourselves for one hour, nature quickly sinks under its own weight, and through the weakness of our faculties we grow weary of our pleasures. *The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*^z.

^z Matth. xxvi. 41.

But in heaven, the sweets of contemplation will suffer no interruption or allay from these or any other circumstances whatever. Encompassed as the immortal spirit is with scenes infinitely bright and diversified, it still stands collected within itself. Enraptured as it is with the warmest and most extatic passions, its perceptions and reasonings still remain clear serene and steady. And fast as its attention is held to truths the most abstruse and intricate, it still preserves its original sprightliness, vigor and activity. Between the object and the intellect there is a suitable proportion; and prodigious as the weight of knowledge and pleasure is, the immortal mind sustains it without the least pain or difficulty. The ease therefore with which they pursue their contemplations, will add infinitely to the pleasure they afford.

Nor will the intercourses of the Blessed be subject to any of those inconveniencies, which we now sensibly feel and lament. That there is among them a mutual exchange of ideas and sentiments, such as answers to what we mean by conversation or discourse, is not to be questioned. For otherwise, to what purpose are we told in

scripture of their forming one general assembly^a, of their sitting down with Abraham Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven^b, of their harmoniously singing the song of Moses and the Lamb^c, and of their uniting in the most exalted acts of homage and worship? But how this commerce is carried on, whether by intuition, or by any kind of medium peculiarly adapted to that spiritual state, is to us utterly unknown. Of this however we may be assured, that they communicate their ideas to each other, with a clearness facility and swiftness to which language is an utter stranger; and that they enter into the spirit of each others sentiments, with a warmth and ardor which it is impossible for the utmost efforts of human eloquence to inspire. So that while their discourse for the matter of it affords infinite entertainment to their pure and perfect minds, it hath never the unhappy effect, through any disagreeable mediums of communication, to fatigue and exhaust the spirits.

Such then is the employment of the

^a Heb. xii. 23.

^b Matth. viii. 11.

^c Rev. xv. 3.

Ch. v. 11, 12.

Blessed

Blessed. They associate with the noblest company — They discourse on the most exalted subjects — And they communicate their ideas and feelings to each other, with infinite ease freedom and pleasure.

in the most exalted acts of homage and worship? But how this commerce is carried on, whether by intuition, or by any kind of medium peculiarly adapted to that spiritual state, is to us utterly unknown. Of this however we may be assured, that they communicate their ideas to each other, with a clearness facility and swiftness to which language is an utter stranger; and that they enter into the spirit of each others sentiments, with a warmth and ardor which it is impossible for the utmost efforts of human eloquence to inspire. So that while their discourse for the matter of it affords infinite entertainment to their pure and perfect minds, it hath never the unhappy effect, through any disagreeable mediums of communication, to fatigue and exhaust the spirits.

Such then is the employment of the

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c. Rev. xv. 3.

Blessed

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DISCOURSE XVII.

PART III.

IN order to frame some idea of the happiness of heaven, we have proposed to consider — After what manner good men exist in that state — The perfection to which their nature attains — Their employment — The blessedness which thence results to them — And the duration of their felicity. We have discoursed of the three first of these, and we now proceed,

FOURTHLY, To speak of the refined and substantial bliss which results from those exercises of the saints, as they have been faintly described.

What hath been observed concerning the employment of the Blessed, may be all

all resolved into the idea of communion with God. For whatever be the subjects on which they contemplate and converse, and however their hearts are affected towards each other, GOD IS ALL IN ALL. Now as God is the Chief Good, a clear and lively perception of his infinite excellencies must beget — *Love* — *Union* — *Likeness* — and *Satisfaction*; all which makes up the sum total of that bliss the saints enjoy in heaven.

1. Their contemplation of God excites in their breasts a pure and ardent *Love* towards him.

No sooner do the ideas of beauty, harmony and excellence strike our imagination, but we instantly feel correspondent affections of esteem admiration desire, and consequently pleasure; for of all the passions of the human soul love is the most chearful and enlivening, insomuch that it sometimes produces a kind of rapture or transport in the breast. But in the present life, this passion, though wound up to the highest pitch, is not capable of making us completely happy. For, besides the consideration that our judgment and senses often deceive us, it is certain that the object be-
loved,

loved, be it ever so amiable, hath in it a mixture of deformity and imperfection. So that our passion for worldly good, whatever tumultuous pleasure it may excite in us for a few moments, is sure in the end to disappoint if not torment us.

But the reverse of this is the case with that pure love, which results from the contemplation and vision of God in heaven. For God is supremely and transcendently glorious. There is in him a concurrence of all possible excellencies in their highest perfection. Whatever we perceive in the creature that is beautiful harmonious and lovely, and so is captivating to the understanding or senses, it resides in him as its fountain originally immutably and eternally. Nature reason and religion, when viewed in their primitive state and arrayed in all the charms imaginable by the human mind, exhibit but a faint resemblance, a pale and shadowy likeness of the infinitely Blessed God. Now this great object is beheld by the saints in heaven, not at a distance, or through mediums capable of imposing upon the understanding and fancy, but, as the scriptures express it, *face to face**, immediately, with a clear and steady eye, and without the least interruption pain or uneasiness.

* 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

There the prayer of Moses, in which thousands with devout affection have joined him, *Lord, I beseech thee shew me thy glory**, is answered to the infinite satisfaction of all. And, thus beholding God, O how must the enraptured soul be inflamed with divine love, and feel the pleasures of that love in their highest perfection! Thus viewing the King in all his glory, how must the heart enamoured of his infinite excellencies, cry out in the extatic language of the prophet, *How great is his goodness! How great is his beauty*†! Thus gazing on the sun of righteousness, shining in the full splendor of his infinite attributes, what light and heat and joy must beam upon their understandings and affections! What venerable ideas of his peerless majesty! What admiring sentiments of his consummate wisdom! What cordial approbation of his perfect justice and holiness! What grateful resentments of his boundless love! And what a complacent enlivening transporting sense of his favor, must pervade through all the powers of the soul, dilate every nerve of the heart, and raise the spirits to a pitch of joy and gladness inconceivable by the Christian in his happiest moments here on earth!—Now

* Exod. xxxiii. 18.

† Zech. ix. 17.

where

where this love of God prevails, there is also,

2. Union with God.

This carries our ideas of the felicity of the heavenly world still higher than has been represented. For it is one thing to perceive the beauties of an object, to feel an affection for it, and to be happy in the exercise of such affection; and another to be united to the object and become one with it. I acknowledge, indeed, that we cannot at present form adequate conceptions of this union of the saints with God; yet it is a matter of which scripture speaks, and is capable of some kind of illustration from experience. The refusion of the soul at death into the *anima mundi* or the Deity, was a notion that obtained much among the Stoical philosophers of old. And there have been those since, who though by no means of that absurd opinion, yet have spoken of a certain illapse by which the divine essence falls in with, and as it were penetrates, the essence of the Blessed. This they have attempted to explain by telling us, “That
“as a piece of iron, red hot by reason of
“the transfusion of the fire into it, appears
“all

“all over like fire; so the souls of the
“Blessed, by this illapse of the divine ef-
“fence into them, are all over divine.”

Whether any thing at all similar to this
is possible, I pretend not to determine. Yet
there is surely a peculiarity and importance,
inexplicable by us at present, in those
amazing words of our Saviour, — *As thou,
Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they
also may be one in us!*

But what I here mean is, a kind of
union with God resembling that of friend-
ship among men, only in an infinitely great-
er perfection. Where friendship is carried
to its utmost height, there is such a close
intimacy, such a communion of senti-
ments, such an intire mutual confidence,
and such innumerable reciprocal endear-
ments, as produce a oneness of interest
temperand, I had almost said, nature, that
is scarcely to be conceived but by those
who feel it. And the happiness which re-
sults hence, next to that which flows from
communion with God, is the most refined
and noble the present life affords. In how
lively a manner does David express this
union of soul with his friend Jonathan, and
the rapturous pleasures of it, in those

John xviii. 21. passionate

passionate words he uttered at his death, *My brother Jonathan, very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women*^r.

Now to apply these ideas to the heavenly state; how sweet how ravishing must be the bliss which arises out of the union that subsists among the blessed spirits above, and which is attended with none of those circumstances that weaken disturb and interrupt the dearest intimacies, the most cordial friendships on earth! And how much more exalted still must be the bliss which is the inseparable concomitant of union with God! To have fellowship with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ^s — to be a partaker of the divine nature^h — to be so joined to the Lord as to be one spiritⁱ; this surely is joy unspeakable and full of glory. For the object to which the soul is united is infinitely perfect, and the soul itself is capable of the most perfect union with it, its powers and affections being enlarged and refined to their utmost extent. But I forbear attempting to explain a subject so far beyond our present comprehension, and which, if it can have any light thrown upon it, is best

^r 2 Sam. i. 26.

^s 1 John i. 3.

^h 2 Pet. i. 4.

ⁱ 1 Cor. vi. 17.

capable of being illustrated by that experience which has been the distinguished privilege of some few Christians, who at certain seasons have been so overwhelmed with divine contemplations, as to be in a manner absorbed and swallowed up in God. — I am however from hence led to speak,

3. Of that *Likeness* which results from this love of God, and union with him, and which is a farther eminent expression of the blessedness of the saints.

Friendship, indeed, supposes some prior similarity of temper and circumstances: for how can two walk together, except they be agreed^k? Yet there may be a real affection between persons who are in some respects unlike each other. As, however, their familiarity increases, and they enter farther into one another's sentiments and dispositions, their mutual resemblance will become more clear and striking. So, the likeness which children bear to their parents, and that in respect of their manners as well as their persons, usually strengthens and improves as they grow in years, and are more and more susceptible of impres-

^k Amos iii. 3.

fions from instruction and example. And thus it is with Christians in regard of the Blessed God. Though their resemblance of him is in the beginning very general and imperfect, so that, like the features in a new-born infant, it is scarcely to be perceived; yet afterwards, as they grow in years and their intimacy with Heaven increases, it becomes more and more visible. There is in the countenances of some good men, I mean their temper and deportment, such a mixture of sweetness beauty and dignity, as strikes almost every beholder, puts their relation to God beyond all dispute, and obliges even the enemies of religion to acknowledge that they have been with Jesus. *Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, they are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord*¹.

But after all, how very imperfect a reflection of the divine excellencies does the brightest character on earth exhibit, in comparison with his who is the least in the kingdom of heaven above? While the glory of the one resembles only the pale light of the moon, that of the other is comparable with the sun shining in its meridian

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 18.

glory. Admitted, as those happy spirits are, not only to the immediate vision, but into the intimate embraces of the Blessed God, O how is his radiant image enstamped on all the faculties of their minds, and on all the dispositions and affections of their hearts! Contemplating the transcendent glories of the omniscient and all-wise God, how are their understandings enriched with inexhaustible treasures of wisdom and knowledge! Conversing with the most amiable of all objects, the Beauty of Holiness, how are their tempers moulded into an exact conformity to that perfect pattern of truth and rectitude, benevolence and love! And feeling, if I may so express myself, their souls united to the Chief Good, how are they filled with all the fulness of God^m! They know even as they are knownⁿ. They are pure as God is pure^o. They are perfect as their Father who is in heaven is perfect^p. So fair, so deep, so abiding an impress of the divine likeness, must surely display beauties to the view of every beholder surpassing all imagination, while it diffuses through the conscious breast pleasures too refined and ecstatic to be described.

^m Eph. iii. 19.ⁿ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.^o 1 John iii. 3.^p Matth. v. 48.

God has even in this life, on some extraordinary occasions, afforded sensible manifestations of his glory; as witness Sinai of old and Tabor afterwards: and the effect was truly great. But what was the lustre which distinguished the countenances of Moses or the apostles, overshadowed as they were with the excellent glory, when compared with that which is now reflected on them from the immediate presence of God above? And what that holy zeal and fervent love, with which these amazing intercourses with the great Father of Spirits inspired their breasts, when compared with what they now feel and enjoy in heaven? It is truly beyond conception. *As for me*, says David exulting in the prospect of that world, *I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness*^a. And though it doth not yet appear what we shall be, yet we know, says the beloved disciple of Jesus, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is^b. — And now, from this ardent love of God, this intimate union with him, and this perfect conformity to his likeness, there results,

^a Pf. xvii. 15.^b 1 John iii. 2.

4. And lastly, *Satisfaction.*

So the psalmist expresses himself in the passage just quoted, "I shall be *satisfied*, "when I awake, with thy likeness." And this is the substance, the quintessence, the perfection of happiness. In the present life, love is often attended with painful and restless desire. Pleasure produces satiety; and of consequence discontent. And excessive joy, by the unnatural ferment it raises in the spirits, deprives us of self-possession, and so in the issue makes us unhappy. Nor is it to be wondered that this is the case, since there is a manifest inequality between the passions of the human heart, and the means which men usually have recourse to for the gratification of them. Our desires are proportioned to objects of the largest dimensions, and of endless duration: but the things of the present life are little vain and transitory. Wherefore if we possessed all the world can give, we should not have enough, there would still remain some wish to be gratified. And with this account of the matter our own continual feelings and experience well agree. For, whatever may be the flattering pretensions of wealth honor and pleasure,

sure, by which, when beheld at a distance, they impose upon the fancy and captivate the heart; we no sooner enjoy them than they loudly tell us, that it is not in their power to make us happy. Nay, though we have the Chief Good for our supreme object, yet, such is the irregularity of our passions in the present imperfect and depraved state, that we find satisfaction, in the highest and noblest sense of it, is absolutely unattainable.

But it is otherwise in heaven. There the affections of the soul, which had treacherously forsaken their first love, and fruitlessly wandered after false delights among the creatures of sense; are brought back to God, united to him their centre, and made completely happy in the full enjoyment of his favor and presence. Completely happy I say, for there being a perfect agreement between the capacity and the object, that is, the desires of the heart being boundless and God infinite, there must proceed from the contemplation and fruition of him a satisfaction that is intire substantial and perpetual. Love has there none of the languishments of restless desire. Pleasure none of the disgusts of satiety. And joy none of the tumult which attends extasy.

extasy. There is no painful division of the heart between God and the creature, no tremblings of the passions through false attractions, no hankering of the mind after inferior bliss. No vacuity in the soul, nor yet oppression of its powers. No wish denied, no expectation disappointed. O happy spirits! They are ever contemplating the Chief Good, yet never wearied with their contemplations. They love, and they *rest in their love*. They possess a *fulness of joy*, yet are not satiated with their joys. Blessed satisfaction indeed! This is the highest felicity to which a creature can attain, the utmost perfection of human nature. GOD IS ALL IN ALL. — And now I have only to add,

FIFTHLY and lastly, That the happiness of the saints is eternal.

The short duration of all sublunary bliss has ever been considered as a striking expression of the vanity of the world. Nor can we, amidst the pleasant enjoyments of life, give a glance only at this plain truth, without feeling some kind of emotion. The best antidote, however, against the

* Zeph. iii. 17.

* Ps. xvi. 11.

undue influence of such a reflection, is a cheerful hope of this happy state I have been describing. But, if the like idea were to start up in the minds of the Blessed above, or if only a jealousy were to arise in their breasts, that at some distant very distant period they might possibly be dismissed from heaven or cease to exist; how would the thought instantly cast a damp upon their pleasures, and confound all their joys! And the effect would be the more considerable, as the pain would be proportioned to the value of what they possess, and their high relish for it. Indeed, were such a circumstance possible, it would rather be kind in God to moderate their pleasures, and to suffer them to sicken upon their enjoyments, that they might be the better reconciled to part with them.

But it is not so. As God hath, of his infinite bounty, prepared unutterable joys for his people in the world to come, so he has affixed no other term to the duration of those joys, than that of his own existence. He is himself ETERNAL, and so is that life he gives them through Jesus Christ his Son. Amazing goodness! And this fact, so exceedingly important, stands as firmly established as the reality of a future state

state of happiness itself. For it is scarce ever spoken of in scripture, but some epithet is annexed to it that should convey this idea. The persons habitations possessions honors and enjoyments of the saints are all eternal.

Here, the term of our existence is short. The beauty and vigor of youth quickly decline, and the firmness and experience of riper years quickly yield to the assaults of sickness age and death. But in heaven the saints never die, nor are they subject to any change or declension; but retain their capacities and endowments both of mind and body perfect and intire for ever. Here, one generation passeth away and another cometh; societies are dissolved, or else composed of new members. But no such revolutions happen in the general assembly above: the company once met never part. Our dwellings on earth are at best but tabernacles, set up for the convenience of the traveller on his way home. Nay this globe itself, stately and beautiful as the edifice is, must shortly be dissolved, and, "like the "baseless fabric of a vision, leave not a "wreck behind." But the house which God has built for his family above, the pa-

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lace wherein he resides, the world where he displays the perfection of his glory, *that is eternal in the heavens*^a. Our inheritances here we hold on a very uncertain tenure: they are sometimes snatched from us by avarice and oppression; or, if they escape the hands of violence, death quickly comes, turns us out of possession, and puts others in our room. But the heavenly inheritance is as *durable*, as it is fair and extensive^b. The *treasures* laid up for the saints in that better world *moth cannot corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal*^c; it is an *enduring substance*^d, and a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory^e. The honors of the present life, however they may dazzle an ambitious eye, are precarious and fleeting. Princes who shine in pomp and power, are in a few years obliged to descend from their thrones, lay aside their robes, and resign their sceptres to their successors. But the *crown* which the Lord, the righteous Judge, puts upon the head of the conquering Christian, *fades not away*^f; the *kingdom* he gives his little flock is *never moved*^g. In fine, while daily experience

^a 2 Cor. v. 1. ^b 1 Pet. i. 4. ^c Matth. vi. 20.

^d Heb. x. 34. ^e 2 Cor. iv. 17.

teaches

teaches that sensual pleasures are as transitory as they are unsatisfying, yea, that the most refined enjoyments of the present life have their continual allays and interruptions, we are assured that the joys of heaven are not only unutterable but eternal. They who possess them know that they are perpetual; nor does the most distant suspicion that they will be interdicted or diminished, ever glance upon their happy minds. The sun that lightens that world never goes down, nor is one ray of its glory ever eclipsed by an interposing cloud. The capacities of the saints suffer no decay, nor does their relish for the pure and substantial pleasures of paradise in the least abate. So that when millions of years have rolled around, it may still be truly said of them, that they are but beginning their bliss. *The end*, the period of the Christian's existence here, is to him the commencement of *everlasting life*.

Thus have we taken a general and transient view of the heavenly blessedness; considered — after what manner good men exist in that state — the perfection of their nature — their employment — the pleasures which result thence — and their eternal duration.

But, amidst all the light which scripture has thrown upon this important and animating subject, how faint inadequate and confused are our ideas of that world! Indeed the most exalted description that can possibly be given of it, falls infinitely short of what it really is. So he hath assured us who was once caught up into paradise, and felt awhile the transporting joys of that blissful place: *Eye hath not seen, says he, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him^a.* The eye may have seen a great deal, the ear may have heard of more than the eye hath seen, and fancy may represent to the mind scenes far more beautiful and glorious, than either the eye hath beheld or the ear reported. But the utmost efforts of imagination, assisted by all the light which scripture and experience furnish, fail in the attempt to give us a true idea of the glories of heaven. Let us now then close the whole,

III. With some improvement of what has been said. And,

^a 2 Cor. xii. 2, 3, 4.

^a 1 Cor. ii. 9.

I. How

1. How great, how inexpressibly great, are our obligations to the grace of God!

This *eternal life* I have been describing, is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord, as we learn from the verse following the text. Benefits, benefits conferred on the miserable and undeserving, and benefits conferred on them at a great expence, call aloud for gratitude. So we commonly reason upon acts of benevolence among men. But O! what is the debt of gratitude we any of us, in the most extraordinary instance, owe to a fellow-creature, when put in the scale with that we owe to our Divine Benefactor? The gift he bestows is, as you have seen, immensely great. Its value cannot be computed, all human measures fail. If the sum total of worldly bliss and glory were to become the patrimony of one man, that man would be poor abject and miserable, in comparison with him who holds the lowest rank in the kingdom of heaven. We are not indeed at present in possession of this large and fair inheritance, but we have unquestionable evidence of its reality. It lies beyond the line of time, but it is not afar off. The earnest of it is sometimes afforded the Christian in
his

his way to it, and the enjoyment of it is secured to him by the promise of a God who cannot lie. These are chearful considerations, and may well dispose our hearts to thankfulness and praise.

But how is our wonder heightened, and our gratitude inflamed, when to the greatness of the gift we add a reflection on the demerit of the receiver! Had we, like the angels, preserved our innocence, the good news of this farther accession to our happiness in another state, would doubtless have been joyfully received and ingenuously acknowledged. But what shall we say? How shall we express our astonishment? when we see human guilt, impotence and wretchedness become objects of divine pity, friendship and love. Surely that grace must be admirable, which does not only relieve the miserable; but makes them perfectly and eternally happy! — which does not only bear with offenders, and punish them less than their deserts; but buries all their guilt in oblivion, and accepts them as innocent! — which does not only hold back rebels from the hands of provoked justice; but exalts them to heaven, and crowns them with unfading glory! Admirable grace indeed! which of its own pure good-will pours a profusion of
bounty

bounty on some, whilst others suffer the just consequence of their sins. — But is this all? No.

There is another consideration, which yet farther magnifies the goodness of God, and gives it a lustre almost too bright and dazzling to be beheld by our weak eyes; and that is the prodigious expence at which this free gift of divine love is dispensed to us. *God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up to death for our sakes, that through him we might thus freely inherit all things.* Go, Christian, to Mount Calvary, there see your Saviour extended on a cross, pouring out his vital blood as the price of your redemption; and then say, Whether the eternal inheritance, received as the fruit of his death, is not the noblest expression of love which Omnipotence itself could give? Nor can I help observing here, that as on the one hand, these measures which God hath taken to provide for our everlasting happiness, reflect the highest honor on his goodness; so, on the other, they serve to heighten and magnify our conceptions of the heavenly blessedness itself beyond any thing that hath been, or can possibly be said

Rom. viii. 32.

concerning

concerning it. For how great must that bliss and glory be which is obtained for us at so immense an expence? The Son of God becomes a man and dies, that men may become the sons of God and live for ever! — Be your hearts then, Christians, dissolved in gratitude and praise! and begin here on earth the song, which you will ere long sing in concert with angels above! *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing!*

2. If we have such glorious prospects as these before us, how should our affections be moderated to the world, and all its concerns and enjoyments!

No sober man, methinks, even though we put religion out of the question, can help being afflicted and surprised, when he looks around him and observes what a prodigious effect the little things of this life have upon the generality of mankind. On the generality did I say? I may add on every individual in a greater or less degree. Ah! how eagerly do we catch at shadows! and how miserably are we affrighted at what cannot hurt us! How do we spend

the fire of our passions in the uncertain pursuit of that which disappoints, if not torments; while the feeblest efforts to acquire the greatest good, quickly try our strength and exhaust our spirits! Strange! Will not reason and reflection convince us of our folly? Will not observation and experience bring us to our senses? Shall two of the plainest truths that were ever reported in the ear of man, and which we dare not deny or even dispute, that the world cannot satisfy, and that if it could a few years will deprive us of it; shall these plain truths, I say, be disregarded and despised? Yes. So it is, so it will be, while we walk by sight not by faith; while we look to the things which are temporal, and turn away our eyes from those which are eternal. Faith, and faith only, will break the charm, rouse us from the delusion, and restore us to our reason. O the infinite utility and importance of a divine faith!

It is your happiness, Christian, to possess that faith! Take up the glass then, apply it to the great objects I have been describing, and tell us the effect. — You see the joys of heaven. They are real. They are near. They are yours. — And now, satisfied

fied through grace of your interest in the favor of God, and struck with the prospect of these great enjoyments before you, What think you of the world? Is it that important thing the generality of mankind take it to be? Ah! No. It appears little vain and trifling. You wonder it should have so long engrossed your heart. Your passion for it abates, your indifference to it increases. Its power is broken. It is now too feeble a thing to subdue your conscience, or even controul your joys. Your happiness no longer lies at the mercy of its deceitful and precarious promises. While you relish the comforts of life, and have a just sense of their value; you stretch not every nerve to possess a feather, nor hazard your most essential interests to acquire momentary bliss. And while you feel the disappointments and troubles of life, you fall not an ignominious sacrifice to their rage, but preserve a composure and steadiness of mind truly heroic and exemplary. Happy temper this! an acquisition far more noble and important than that of the whole world! Well! such is the effect of a lively faith and chearful hope of eternal life. O let us then, who are heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, be persuaded

suaded to give diligence to make our calling and election sure; and more frequently to realize these great and glorious objects. So shall we be superior to the frowns and flatteries of this vain world. So shall we be quickened to the unwearied discharge of our several duties. And so shall we adorn our Christian profession with the amiable fruits of patience contentment and cheerfulness, of purity love and obedience. Once more,

3. And lastly, What infinite importance does the consideration of heaven reflect upon religion in general!

Eternal life, it is true, is the gift of God. But it is not to be enjoyed, unless we humbly and thankfully accept it in the way he has thought fit to bestow it, and are prepared for the final participation of it by the gracious influence of his Spirit. *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved^e. Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God^h.* They are the words of him, through whose hands, and at the expence of whose precious blood, the blessings of grace and glory are distributed to guilty men. And can you be content, Sirs,

^e Mark xvi. 16.

^h John iii. 3.

to forego the joys of heaven for the momentary gratifications of sin and sense? Or if you can, Is there nothing alarming in the tremendous consequences of your exclusion from that world, I mean your suffering the torments of hell? For, if we will believe the scriptures, there is no medium between these two states. Awful consideration! Let me therefore intreat you, by the mercies of God, by the bowels of Christ, by the terrors of the law, by the grace of the gospel, by the debt you owe to your immortal souls, in short by every thing that is dear to you both here and hereafter, seriously to consider these things. *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation¹. Kiss the Son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, if his wrath be kindled but a little^k.* Cast down the weapons of your hostility at his feet, and be assured, that, as his heart is made of gentleness and love, he will in no wise reject the humble returning penitent.

Here I might, yet farther to conciliate your regards, with the blessing of God, to these interesting matters, lead you into a pleasing view of the nature of religion, lay

¹ 2 Cor. vi. 2.

^k Ps. ii. 12.

before you the evidence of its truth, and delineate its various excellent properties and important uses. I might tell you whence it comes, through what channel it is communicated to us, the means by which it is improved and preserved, the comfort it affords in the hour of death, and its happy consummation in heaven. Animating considerations these! But as I have dwelt at large upon them in the preceding discourses, it shall suffice here to call up the leading ideas to your view.

*The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power*¹. Religion consists not in appearance and profession only, but in the cheerful and prevailing subjection of the heart to the dominion of God, exerted over the soul through the mild and gentle administration of the Lord Jesus Christ. — Its reality is capable of the clearest proof from the nature of the thing itself, the testimony of scripture concerning it, and the consent of the generality of mankind in all ages: so that their madness and folly is inexcusable, who *deny the power of godliness*^m. — And however, as to external circumstances, it may assume different appearances; yet it is one and the same thing in all who are so

¹ Dis. I.

^m Dis. II.

happy as to possess it: for, in regard of that humility cheerfulness purity and love which the gospel teaches and inspires, good men *have all of them, in their degree, been made to drink into one spirit*^a. — Nor is it a matter of trifling consequence. It is the *one thing needful*^b: far more important than any other concern whatever; that without which a man stands exposed to every kind of danger here, and to the just wrath of God hereafter. — Difficulties do indeed attend the experience and profession of it in the present life: for he who will be a man of religion must *deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Christ*^c. — But these difficulties, of whatever kind or degree, should not unduly discourage, much less alarm and terrify us; for they may be surmounted. *My yoke, says Christ, is easy, my burden is light*^d. He requires nothing of us but it is our duty and interest to comply with. We are under infinite obligations to his grace. He has promised to assist and support us amidst all our trials. Experience has confirmed the truth of his promises. And after all, hard as his service may seem under some particular circumstances, it is much easier than the yoke of sin. — But it is not

^a Dis. III. ^b Dis. IV. ^c Dis. V. ^d Dis. VI.

the only commendation of religion, that it will do a man no real harm; for it will most certainly do him, even in this life, the greatest good. *The ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*. It furnishes the best antidote against the principal causes of uneasiness and distress. It pours the richest comforts and joys into the heart. And there is solid peace and satisfaction in the practice of its several duties. — And as the chearful practice of the duties of religion affords the most substantial, and indeed the only sufficient, evidence of inward piety; so he who thus *bath his fruit unto holiness*, who lives righteously soberly and godlily in this present world, will not fail to become truly venerable and extensively useful.

It is also a farther proof of the excellence of religion, that it is *from above*, the effect of a divine influence or energy exerted on the heart. So it should seem from a review of the manner in which it usually rises into existence. A consideration, however, of the depraved state of human nature, the infinite difficulty attending the great work of renewing the heart, and the clear and express testimony of scripture upon the mat-

ter; I say a dispassionate consideration of these things must surely put the question beyond dispute with a truly serious mind. — In like manner the respect which religion hath to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the grand medium of it, reflects the greatest importance upon it. *We are created in him*°. It is the fruit of his mediation, communicated to us by his Spirit, produced nourished and improved by the faith of his gospel, and is itself the impress of his image on our hearts and lives. — Nor has the great Author of this the noblest gift ever bestowed on the children of men, failed to provide means for our improvement in religion. As he hath exhorted us to *grow in grace*°, so to that end he has urged upon us, by the most pressing motives, the general duties of watchfulness self-examination and consideration, and the more special duties of reading the scriptures, attending the worship of God, Christian fellowship and prayer. — And since these means will of themselves prove ineffectual, he hath encouraged us to look for that influence from above, which, *like the dew** that falls from the heavens, gradually imperceptibly seasonably and sometimes in

° Dis. X.

° Dis. XI.

* Dis. XII.

a very large degree descends on the Christian, and so refreshes his heart, confirms his faith, makes him fruitful, and renders him truly amiable. — Nay such is his concern for the welfare of his people, that he converts their afflictions into blessings, and makes them at once the occasions of trying the genuineness of their religion, and displaying its utility. *Be still*, is his language, *and know that I am God*¹: so exciting them to patience and constancy, by a consideration of the existence, perfections, providence and grace of God, as they are held up to our view in the gospel of Christ. — And, thus rejoicing in tribulation, we are animated to perseverance in our profession. *Though sometimes faint, yet*, roused by a just apprehension of the tremendous consequences of yielding to the enemy, and inspired with resolution by a firm persuasion of the goodness of the cause, the effectual support promised us, and the glories of the approaching victory, *we pursue*². — Nor will divine grace suffer the real Christian to fail of the happiness he hath in prospect; for *he who hath begun a good work in him, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*³. From the nature of religion itself

¹ Dis. XIII.

² Dis. XIV.

³ Dis. XV.

and the promises made to it, its successful issue may be certainly concluded. — Religion, thus traced through its various pleasures duties exercises and trials, appears amiable useful and important. But what additional glories does it exhibit in the countenance of the dying Christian, who *walking through the valley of the shadow of death fears no evil!* And why? *The Lord his Shepherd is with him, and his rod and staff defend and comfort him*^b. — And though we take our leave of him at the borders of the other world, and are not permitted to enter with him and see the glories with which he is there crowned; yet from what has now been said we may, we must conclude, that *that* of all other things is most interesting and important which hath for its *end*, for its final reward, *everlasting life*^c.

And now, Is there a man who, amidst these considerations, can find it in his heart to treat the great concerns of religion with indifference and contempt? If there is, all I can do is to mingle compassion for his madness and folly, with the resentment I feel at his profaneness and impiety; and most earnestly to deprecate the vengeance

^b Dis. XVI.^c Dis. XVII.

he is thus drawing down on his guilty head. *But I hope better things of you to whom I speak, and things which accompany salvation*^a. You, my friends, have I trust tasted the pleasures of religion, or however are excited by what you have heard to an eager pursuit after them. While therefore I affectionately commend the humble inquirer to the farther influence of divine grace; permit me, now at the close of the whole, to congratulate you on the joyful prospect before you, of the final consummation of your hopes in the realms of light and glory above.

^a Heb. vi. 9.

THE END.